

Guildford School of Acting

Inspection of colleges participating in the Dance and Drama Award scheme

Unique reference number: 50031

Name of lead inspector: Joanna Beckford-Hall HMI

Last day of inspection: 9 February 2012

Address: Guildford School of Acting
Stag Hill Campus
University of Surrey
Guildford
GU2 7XH

Telephone number: 01483 684040

Website: <http://www.conservatoire.org>

Information about the school

1. Guildford School of Acting (GSA) is a private acting school that offers training for students seeking employment in musical theatre, acting and technical theatre production. GSA runs two three-year diploma courses, the Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre and the Diploma in Professional Acting, and a two-year course in production skills, the Diploma in Professional Production Skills. The diplomas are awarded by Trinity College, London. GSA is accredited by the National Council for Drama Training (NCDT) and is a member of the Conference of Drama Schools (CDS).
2. Over the last three years GSA has been undergoing a substantial period of change including a merger with the University of Surrey. GSA moved to brand new premises on the university campus in Guildford in February 2010. The merger with the university will be completed on 1 April 2012 and GSA will become part of the School of Arts at the University of Surrey and will no longer be a private acting school. At the time of the inspection there were 274 students on the full-time diploma courses of whom 110 are receipt of Dance and Drama Awards (DaDA) funded by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). Of these 111 students in receipt of DaDAs, 29 are production skills students, 46 are acting students and 36 are musical theatre students.

Summary report – musical theatre course

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

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Overall effectiveness of provision | Grade 2 |
|---|----------------|

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Capacity to improve | Grade 2 |
|----------------------------|----------------|

Overall effectiveness

3. Guildford School of Acting (GSA) offers good quality training in musical theatre. At the time of the inspection 139 students were studying on the three-year musical theatre course, of whom 36 (26%) are in receipt of DaDAs. Most students complete the musical theatre course and achieve a good standard of work by the time they graduate with their diploma award. The large majority of students secure employment within six months of leaving the course and almost all students are employed within a year, a trend sustained since the last inspection.
4. The quality of the curriculum and teaching are good and pastoral care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. As a result students make good progress and by the time they leave the course they are well equipped with musical theatre performing skills. Teaching is good and most lessons involve discussions, effective probing questioning and tasks that help students explore their 'triple threat' training in a way that connects singing, dancing and acting skills. Students are pleased that the tutoring system helps them set their own discipline-specific targets and most students review these frequently as part of their reflective journals.
5. GSA is well led and managed. Leaders demonstrate good capacity to secure further improvement. The director of GSA and the deputy director of studies help tutors maintain detailed schemes of work for their respective module teaching, and most tutors guide students to make connections across disciplines. The musical theatre tutors are passionately committed to continually improving the course. They share their expertise well and keep each other abreast of changes encountered in the industry through their connections and external professional work. This is used well to inform discussion about how to redesign module content and sustain high relevance to the needs of the industry. Leaders have successfully addressed the points for action and recommendations from the last inspection for the musical theatre course.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What students like:

- the new GSA building with fantastic new studios and facilities
- the new fully equipped Ivy Arts Centre and theatre as a performance venue
- good quality teaching
- excellent pastoral care and guidance
- access to the wealth of study resources both in the university library and through designated performing arts teaching spaces at GSA and across the campus
- the range and depth of study in the musical theatre curriculum that is rooted in the 'triple threat' training model
- extensive opportunity to work with leading industry practitioners for production work
- opportunity to perform in GSA student company work such as GSA Singers or GSA Dancers.

What students would like to see improved:

- a more intensive taught course in the final year to make sure they are fully prepared for demanding auditions (third-year musical theatre students)
- more regular guidance and tutoring support from the second year onwards for putting together covering letters and curriculum vitae to agents
- more acting for camera classes
- a guarantee of a cover teacher when regular teachers are absent
- more regular communication about the re-structuring of the leadership teams and staffing plans for their course.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- willingness of students to accept constructive criticism to help them refine their skills
- good professional etiquette and appropriate professional attitudes to learning when working with guest tutors from the industry
- the good standard of student performances in 'triple threat'
- willingness of leaders to listen to suggestions from industry practitioners.

What employers would like to see improved:

- there were no recommendations from employers.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

6. Since the last inspection there have been substantial changes at senior and middle leadership and significant staff turnover as a result of the merger with the University of Surrey and restructuring of GSA. Leaders have sustained at least good outcomes for students, ensuring that the significant benefits of the merger with the university are balanced with the continuing importance and celebration of the GSA brand and the recruitment and success of high calibre students. Members of the integration board, comprising university staff and GSA leaders, have worked tirelessly to ensure that the impact of the changes is positive. Staff say that communication since last summer is much improved. The new director of GSA is guiding staff successfully through the final stages of the merger and the further imminent changes at senior and middle leadership.
7. Changes over the last few years have led to challenges in coordinating and evaluating a robust process for quality assuring teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are good and occasionally outstanding, but critical engagement with evidence from lesson observations has not led to a sharply focused review of the impact of teaching on students' progress and overall achievement. Leaders undertake observations of tutors and some observations forms comment usefully about teaching methods. The forms however are lengthy and commentary rarely evaluates students' progress. Leaders are not accustomed to doing joint observations to standardise judgements about the quality of teaching and few use specific observation criteria to measure the quality of students' learning. Teachers have a wealth of industry experience but few have a formally recognised teaching qualification. Leaders support tutors' professional development through many subject specific training courses.

Outcomes for students

Grade 2

8. Students achieve a good level of work by the end of the course. Over the last three years most students have been retained on the course and they successfully attain their Trinity diploma. The pass rate dipped slightly in 2009 to 78% because several students failed their professional development files (PDF). Since then the pass rate has risen to 100% for those who complete the third year and leaders are continuing to work on refining the tutoring of PDFs.
9. Recent reports by Trinity College describe students' work often as outstanding in their vocal range, and comment on the high quality

truthful performances with believable characters and much versatility. Many students achieve sophisticated vocal techniques and credible accents evidenced in recent showcase performances. Students acquire good dance skills so that their stamina and use of the stage space are well assured. Many reports by Trinity assessors indicate that the choice of productions is well suited to stretching the performance levels of final year students.

10. The quality of students' work in contextual studies is variable. Some students undertake detailed research about leading contemporary and historic practitioners and use this research well in essays. A few students are over-reliant on internet sources with limited bibliographic breadth. Their work does not show detailed engagement with the extensive resources in the library to deepen their knowledge.
11. The large majority of students secure employment as a 'triple threat' performer within six months of graduating from the course. This is higher for students in receipt of DaDA's at 86%. Almost all students gain professional representation once they leave GSA. Graduates frequently secure work in the West End and in leading UK touring shows such as 'Phantom of the Opera', 'Oliver', 'Legally Blonde' and 'Evita'. Musical theatre graduates possess good quality acting skills and they increasingly attain television work. Typical jobs also include commercial dance work, cabaret work and occasionally cruise ship work. Leaders collate graduate destinations but scrutiny of the progression of graduates in the industry and their career trajectory is lacking. Evidence of alumni achievement is not used well enough to evaluate the impact of training on outcomes for students over time.
12. Students meet the high expectations for punctuality, conduct and personal presentation. Most students have at least good attendance. Students are selected from highly competitive auditions. Leaders have tightened up the selection process with decisions made by the in-house team as opposed to sessional tutors, giving greater assurance that potential is judged by the core teaching team who work daily with students. Students find the audition process demanding and are pleased that it includes an introduction to life as a GSA student on the university campus. Students receive good induction to their course and most make good progress from their starting points. Leaders do not track students' progress in a systematic way that captures how well each student meets or exceeds their potential judged at audition.
13. Students feel exceptionally safe and well cared for. Students have a good understanding of nutrition and its impact on stamina and performance. They enjoy use of the extensive university sporting facilities to complement their studio training and students attend additional dance classes in the evening. Students' understanding of

healthy lifestyles is good but is not always captured thoroughly in their written work.

14. Students receive good preparation for their future economic well-being through an extensive performance schedule and good opportunity to work with a range of directors for productions such as 'Spring Awakening'. The professional jury panel of industry agents and directors is useful for giving feedback to students about their audition work. Leaders recognise that asking colleagues to write a brief report on each student in quick succession leads to these not being completed with the required depth to indicate how to improve as well as what to improve. Leaders are beginning to plan more sessions for professional development. Even so, the third-year performance schedule is not complemented by intensive taught sessions to really help students to improve their submissions to agents and the quality of their curriculum vitae.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

15. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers enable students to develop a good range of technical skills. In voice classes students are pushed to achieve demanding expressive and interpretative qualities. Tutors demonstrate very well and their professional industry experience often shines through, inspiring students to challenge themselves because the energy of teachers sustains the pace of learning. In an outstanding tap dance lesson and an outstanding rehearsal for the third-year performance of 'Spring Awakening', the depth and pace of feedback to individuals and to the whole cast kept students engaged and highly enthusiastic. Complex rhythmic work in the tap lesson and the determined focus of the tutor team in the rehearsal of 'Spring Awakening' literally kept students on their toes, reinforcing prior learning while demanding rapid skill development.
16. Teaching is occasionally overly didactic. Tutors teach to the whole group with infrequent use of pair work, creative risk taking and limited planning of tasks to meet varying levels of ability. In a few lessons the relationship between contextual research, theory and practice is missing. Teachers do not maximise opportunities to help students analyse why they are learning a particular skill and not just how to do it.
17. Summative assessment is very good and modules include clear descriptions of marking criteria. Feedback from external examiners is positive about students' good achievement. Since the last inspection leaders have developed a stronger focus on personal goal setting. Personal statements of learning, used at the end of the spring term, successfully help students reflect on feedback from a panel of tutors. However, information about students' progress derived from assessment

is not used routinely to inform lesson planning and teaching in order that all students are stretched and challenged.

18. The curriculum provides good training, bringing together singing, dance and acting as a modular course. The module 'rehearsal projects' from the first to third year helps students become familiar with the demands of devised and repertory work as multidisciplinary students. The performance of a full length musical at the end of the second year leads well into demanding productions in the third year. Through the inclusion of different dance genres leaders have addressed the need to develop students' core strength, stamina and technical dance skills. Students are exposed to many acting techniques in their first year from acting in the musical and ensemble through to more classical derived text-based work in the second year. First and second-year students are pleased with the balance of the timetable. Leaders recognise the need to continually broaden the repertoire to ensure that material used reflects world-wide cultures and interests, both in lessons and for annual productions.
19. GSA has sustained outstanding relationships with industry professionals, local schools and community organisations to enrich students' learning. Students have very good opportunity to perform locally in Guildford theatres, stretching their leadership and team skills for productions in different venues. An impressive array of directors regularly works with students on curriculum productions. Students enjoy devoting time to performing with student companies such as GSA Singers and GSA Dancers, performing at many local venues.
20. Pastoral guidance and welfare support are outstanding. GSA students benefit from equal access to the extensive student support services offered by the university. Students are confident that any injuries are dealt with expertly by the visiting physiotherapist. Sprung-floored studios in the new building have resulted in much fewer injuries.
21. Leaders support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through good tutorial support and good communication with the central university services for additional learning support. Student records are not always updated with information on how students receiving additional support are progressing. A few students do not achieve the required standard for final year written work because of a lack of robust formative tutoring advice to help them acquire step-by-step skills for critical writing.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

22. Leadership and management of the musical theatre course are good. The new director of GSA communicates well with staff so that ongoing structural changes are understood clearly. In leading the final stages of

the merger with the university, the director and integration committee are planning carefully, so that new leadership roles are exactly right in taking GSA into the next phase of development and consolidation. The director of GSA has ambitious plans to strengthen sharing of teaching practice and subject knowledge across the diploma courses, already evident in greater collaboration between production skills, acting and musical theatre students.

23. Tutors observe each other teaching leading to much informal sharing of practice and fruitful discussion about how well different modules of the course are progressing. Department meetings and meetings of the learning and teaching committee address issues with each year group, but there is limited penetrating evaluation of students' progress based on the targets for each student or the cohort as a whole. For this reason leaders and teaching teams are not sufficiently focused on assessing how well students are learning in lessons or how teachers are working with educational principles that promote good or better learning in a vocational studio context.
24. Self-assessment grades are generous, but in discussion leaders show a good understanding of strengths and areas requiring development. Course evaluation and action planning take good account of staff and student feedback and reports by external assessors from Trinity College. Leaders have identified which areas of the musical theatre course need refining, such as the third-year course for professional development portfolios and contextual studies. Despite such knowledge, the self-assessment document and action plans are insufficiently supported by evaluative quantitative data such as analysis of trends for applications and enrolments, retention, achievement over time and progression of alumni in the industry. This is a priority for improvement in securing a more rigorous foundation for development planning and linking evaluation back to outcomes for students.
25. Communication with staff has improved. There is greater confidence in leaders, better staff morale and a more optimistic vision which staff are wholly committed to after a period of uncertainty. Most students judge that their views about the course are sought by leaders. The current third-year students are frustrated by the limited intensity of their final year. They are anxious about limited taught sessions to prepare them for auditions, interviews and final year written work alongside their equally important performance schedules.
26. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Students treat each other with respect and fairness within their competitive training. Students say discriminatory incidents are rare. Students from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds work well together. Leaders are aware of the need to attract a greater proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and are keen to maximise opportunities afforded

through the merger to raise the profile of the diploma courses to international students and those from under-represented groups. Data show no difference in achievement by gender, ethnicity, or by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Leaders are at the initial stages of tracking outcomes and destinations by student groups.

27. Arrangements to keep students safe are good. Staff make sure that students are fully aware of safe studio and production practice. Studios are monitored closely in meeting statutory health and safety guidelines. GSA's merger with the university brings substantial benefit financially and in resourcing for student support, study and staff development. GSA makes effective use of the new building with excellent studio facilities, complemented by the new Ivy Arts Centre for performance work. GSA provides good value for money.

What does Guildford School of Acting need to do to improve further?

- Develop the capacity of middle leaders so that all leaders focus on quality assuring teaching and learning, with a strategically planned cycle of lesson observations designed to continually improve teaching practices.
- Ensure that all leaders have the capacity to evaluate the impact of individual disciplines and departments against measurable outcomes for students. Bring about much more critical engagement with data to determine trends and implications of this for evaluation and action planning.
- Engage all leaders in a robust cycle of lesson observations so that leaders can standardise their judgements and discuss how to maximise students' progress in individual lessons and over time.
- Enable more teachers to gain a formal teaching qualification and develop a community of rigorous pedagogical debate to drive teaching from good to consistently outstanding.
- Provide all final-year students with an intensive taught course and supplementary tutoring to prepare them fully for demanding auditions and interviews, and develop necessary research and literacy skills to produce high quality final year portfolios.
- Provide all leaders with alumni information on a regular basis and ensure this is used effectively to analyse the career trajectory of graduates.

| Record of main findings | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|---------------|
| Provider name | Guildford School of Acting: Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre | Inspection number | 376309 |
| Learning types: 18+ learners responsive: FE full-time courses. | | | |

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate | Overall |
| Approximate number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection Full-time learners. | 139 |
| Overall effectiveness | 2 |
| Capacity to improve | 2 |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 |
| 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? | 2 |
| How safe do learners feel? | 1 |
| <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i> | 2 |
| <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i> | NA* |
| Quality of provision | 2 |
| 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? | 1 |
| Leadership and management | 2 |
| 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> | NA* |
| 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? | 2 |
| 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? | 2 |
| How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money? | 2 |

*where applicable to the type of provision

Summary report – acting course

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

| |
|---|
| Overall effectiveness of provision |
|---|

| |
|----------------|
| Grade 2 |
|----------------|

| |
|----------------------------|
| Capacity to improve |
|----------------------------|

| |
|----------------|
| Grade 2 |
|----------------|

Overall effectiveness

28. Guildford School of Acting (GSA) offers good quality training in acting. At the time of the inspection 64 students were studying on the three-year acting course of whom 46 (72%) are in receipt of DaDAs. Most students complete the course and achieve a good standard of work by the time they graduate. The large majority secure employment within six months of leaving the course and almost all students are employed within a year, a trend sustained since the last inspection.
29. The quality of the curriculum and teaching are good and pastoral care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. As a result students make good progress and by the time they leave the course they are well equipped with acting skills that are transferable to live theatre, radio, film and television work. Teaching is good and most lessons involve discussions, effective probing questioning and tasks that help students explore their journey as an actor. The combination of good summative assessment and the effective tutoring system helps students to set discipline-specific targets. They review these frequently as part of their own reflective journals and in individual sessions with the acting tutors.
30. GSA is well led and managed. Leaders demonstrate good capacity to secure further improvement. The director of GSA and the deputy director of studies help tutors maintain detailed schemes of work for their respective module teaching and most tutors guide students to make connections across disciplines. Acting tutors are passionately committed to continually improving the course. They share their expertise well and keep each other abreast of changes encountered in the industry through their connections and external professional work. This is used well to inform discussion about how to redesign module content and sustain high relevance to the needs of the industry. Leaders have successfully addressed the points for action and recommendations from the last inspection.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What students like:

- the new GSA building with fantastic new studios and facilities
- the new well-equipped Ivy Arts Centre and theatre as a performance venue for students' work
- good quality teaching drawing on tutors industry expertise
- excellent pastoral care and guidance
- access to the wealth of university study resources both in the university library and through designated performing arts teaching spaces at GSA and across the campus
- the range and depth of the acting curriculum
- extensive opportunity to work with leading directors for productions.

What students would like to see improved:

- third-year acting students want a more intensive taught course in their final year to make sure they are fully prepared for interviews and auditions
- more regular guidance and tutoring support from the second year onwards for putting together covering letters and curriculum vitae to agents
- more regular communication about the re-structuring of the leadership teams and staffing plans for their course.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- good professional etiquette and appropriate professional attitudes for entry to the acting industry
- the willingness of students to be open to constructive criticism to help them refine their skills
- the good standard of student performance in live acting work and for film, television and radio
- willingness of leaders to listen to suggestions from industry practitioners.

What employers would like to see improved:

- there were no recommendations from employers.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

31. Since the last inspection there have been substantial changes at senior and middle leadership and significant staff turnover as a result of the merger with the University of Surrey and restructuring of GSA. Leaders have sustained at least good outcomes for students, ensuring that the significant benefits of the merger with the university are balanced with the continuing importance and celebration of the GSA brand and the recruitment and success of high calibre acting students. Members of the integration board, including university staff and GSA leaders, have worked tirelessly to ensure that the impact of change is positive. Staff say that communication since last summer is much improved. The new director of GSA is guiding staff successfully through the final stages of the merger and further imminent changes at senior and middle leadership.
32. Changes over the last few years have led to challenges in coordinating and evaluating a robust process for quality assuring teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are good and occasionally outstanding, but critical engagement with evidence from lesson observations has not led to a sharply focused review of the impact of teaching on students' progress and overall achievement. Leaders undertake observations of tutors and some observations forms comment usefully about teaching methods. The forms however are lengthy and commentary rarely evaluates students' progress. Leaders are not accustomed to doing joint observations to standardise judgements about the quality of teaching and few use specific observation criteria to measure the quality of students' learning. Teachers have a wealth of industry experience but few have a formally recognised teaching qualification.

Outcomes for students

Grade 2

33. Students achieve a good standard of work by the end of the course. Over the last three years retention has stayed above 90% and those who complete the course successfully attain their Trinity diploma. Recent reports by Trinity College describe students' work as very secure in their vocal range, with high quality truthful performances in acting through song. Recent reports by Trinity College describe acting students as physically assured and able to show good reaction through character in the moment of performance. Most students have good versatility, with crisp diction, confident accent work and very good company work. On occasion students overplay their roles and the pace of the performance slows.

34. There is variability in the quality of written work. Most students use their reflective journals well and inspectors saw these used in some classes for relevant note taking. Not all tutors encourage the marking up of resources such as scripts or scores and some students need to develop and use more technical vocabulary. The majority of professional development files are thorough but others lack depth and consolidation of knowledge in the final year. A few students need more personalised guidance to reach the expectations for written work.
35. The large majority of students secure employment as actors for live theatre or recorded media within six months of graduating. Almost all students gain professional representation once they leave GSA. Graduates secure work in regional and national theatre productions, short and feature film work and increasingly in television and radio. Former graduates attain work in series such as 'Doctors' and 'The Inbetweeners' for the BBC and across the country in mainstream and fringe theatre. Great success was achieved last year when a GSA student won one of the four bursaries in the renowned Carlton Hobbs competition and joined Radio Drama Company. The evidence of alumni achievements is not used well enough to evaluate the impact of the acting training on outcomes for students over time.
36. Students meet high expectations for punctuality, conduct and personal presentation and most students have at least good attendance. Students are selected from highly competitive auditions. Students find the audition process demanding and are pleased that it includes an introduction to life as a GSA student on the university campus. Students receive good induction to their course and most make good progress from their starting points. Leaders do not track students' progress in a systematic way that captures how well each student meets or exceeds their potential judged at audition.
37. Students feel safe and exceptionally well cared for. Students are diligent in upholding safe practice for warming up their voice and body and most acting students understand the need to stay fit and healthy to enhance their acting skills. Excellent guidance through the GSA voice clinics help students with any vocal difficulties through rehabilitation.
38. Students receive good preparation for their future economic well-being through an extensive performance schedule and good opportunity to work with a range of directors for productions. The professional jury panel of agents and directors is useful for giving feedback to students about their audition work. Leaders recognise that asking colleagues to write a brief report on each student in quick succession leads to these not being completed with the required depth to indicate how to improve as well as what to improve. Leaders are beginning to plan in more sessions for professional development. Even so, the third-year performance schedule is not complemented by intensive sessions to help

students refine their skill in writing to agents and producing curriculum vitae.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

39. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Teachers enable students to develop a good range of technical skills and in voice classes students are pushed to achieve demanding expressive and interpretative qualities. Good acting lessons are characterised by good use of tutors' professional industry experience and good use of important theoretical concepts that underpin processes taught and used creatively. The head of voice has worked with leaders and her tutor team to develop the teaching of voice as an interdisciplinary model. Students say they feel really challenged with their singing and speech work. They benefit from much personalised feedback in small group teaching. During inspection a good lesson was observed in using primitive voice with the tutor expertly guiding discovery tasks to help students with an imaginative response.
40. The long-term module plans include very clear learning outcomes but these are not distilled into planning for the uniqueness of each group and their differing needs. Some lesson planning is too dense with aims, objectives and outcomes that detract from a tightly-focused lesson plan to determine how to maximise students' progress. This means that the pace of learning slows because students are not encouraged to work independently, explore their own ideas, work with peers or challenge key approaches and why they are used. In some lessons opportunities are missed to help students analyse why they are learning particular acting skills or doing improvisation tasks.
41. Summative assessment is very good and modules include clear descriptions of marking criteria. Feedback from external examiners is positive about good achievement and effective first and second marking for consistency. Since the last inspection leaders have developed a stronger focus on personal goal setting. Personal statements of learning used at the end of the spring term help students successfully reflect on feedback from a panel of tutors. Leaders do not collate on an annual basis any key themes that emerge within and across disciplines from this process. Tracking of students' targets from summative assessments to feed into planning and teaching over time is not always consistent amongst tutors.
42. The curriculum is good, placing appropriate emphasis upon equipping students with the skills to work in live theatre and recorded performance media. This is particularly enhanced through the opportunity to work in the university television studio, which students really enjoy. There is good breadth in the inclusion of combat work, physical acting, play

reading, voice and acting, with tutors making good connections about how the training develops the individual from solo to ensemble performer. First and second-year students are pleased with the balance of the timetable but student feedback shows some concern about the inclusion of ballet classes in the dance training for actors. Leaders acknowledge that there is good value in the discipline of this genre but also accept that some aspects of the dance curriculum need reviewing to look at how other genres and styles might be more relevant to freeing the actor's body to move in different ways.

43. GSA has sustained outstanding relationships with industry professionals, local schools and community organisations to enrich students' experience. Students have very good opportunity to perform locally in Guildford theatres, helping students to develop good leadership and team skills for productions in different venues. The entire third year is devoted to performance work and during the inspection students were working hard on tour to five local schools with 'Macbeth' and were about to commence rehearsals for 'On the Razzle', guest directed by Gary Sefton.
44. Pastoral guidance and welfare support are outstanding. GSA students benefit from equal access to the extensive student support services offered by the university. Students are rightly pleased with provision for health needs through the onsite medical centre. This wraparound care fully supports rapid referral for helping students address personal issues effectively.
45. Leaders support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through good tutorial support and good communication with the central university services for additional learning support. Student records are not always updated with information on how students receiving additional support are progressing. Students with dyslexia would benefit from more support.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

46. Leadership and management of the acting course are good. The new director of GSA communicates well with staff so that ongoing structural changes are understood. In leading the final stages of the merger with the university, the director and integration committee are planning carefully, so that new leadership roles are exactly right in taking GSA into the next phase of development and consolidation. Leaders have rightly chosen not to rush into appointing a new head of acting while decisions about roles and responsibilities for September 2012 are being finalised.

47. The acting tutors enjoy observing each other teaching, leading to much informal sharing of practice and fruitful discussion about how well different modules of the course are progressing, especially in the third-year performance work. Department meetings and the meetings of the learning and teaching committee address issues with each year group, but there is limited penetrating evaluation of students' progress based on the targets for each student or the cohort as a whole. For this reason leaders and teaching teams are not sufficiently focused on assessing how well students are learning in lessons or how teachers are working with educational principles that promote good or better learning in a vocational studio context.
48. Self-assessment grades are generous but in discussion leaders show good understanding of strengths and areas requiring further development. The commentary in the self-assessment report draws key strengths and takes good account of staff and student feedback and reports by external assessors from Trinity College. Leaders have identified which areas of the acting course need refining, such as the professional development course and third-year timetable, along with a review of the dance curriculum for actors and how this informs the actors' study of key practitioners and their working methods. Despite such knowledge, the self-assessment document and action plans are insufficiently supported by evaluative quantitative data such as analysis of trends for applications and enrolments, retention, achievement over time and progression of alumni in the industry.
49. Communication with staff has improved. There is greater confidence in leaders, better staff morale and a more optimistic vision that staff are wholly committed to after a period of uncertainty. Most students judge that their views about the course are sought by leaders. The current third-year students are frustrated by the limited intensity of their final year. They are anxious about limited taught sessions to prepare them for auditions, interviews and final year written work alongside their equally important performance schedules.
50. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Students treat each other with respect and fairness within their competitive training. Students say discriminatory incidents are rare. Students from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds work well together. Leaders are aware of the need to attract a greater proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and are keen to maximise opportunities afforded through the merger to raise the profile of the diploma courses to international students and those from under-represented groups. Data show no difference in achievement by gender, ethnicity, or by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
51. Arrangements to keep students safe are good. GSA makes effective use of the new building with excellent studio facilities, complemented by the

new Ivy Arts Centre for performance work. GSA provides good value for money.

What does Guildford School of Acting need to do to improve further?

- Develop the capacity of middle leaders so that all leaders focus on quality assuring teaching and learning, with a strategically planned cycle of lesson observations designed to continually improve teaching practices.
- Ensure that all leaders have the capacity to evaluate the impact of individual disciplines and departments against measurable outcomes for students. Bring about much more critical engagement with data to determine trends and implications of this for evaluation and action planning.
- Engage all leaders in a robust cycle of lesson observations so that leaders can standardise their judgements and discuss how to maximise students' progress in individual lessons and over time.
- Enable more teachers to gain a formal teaching qualification and develop a community of rigorous pedagogical debate to drive teaching from good to consistently outstanding.
- Provide all final-year students with an intensive taught course and supplementary tutoring to prepare them fully for demanding auditions and interviews, and develop necessary research and literacy skills to produce high quality final year portfolios.
- Provide all leaders with alumni information on a regular basis and ensure this is used effectively to analyse the career trajectory of graduates.

| Record of main findings | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------|---------------|
| Provider name | Guildford School of Acting: Diploma in Professional Acting | Inspection number | 376309 |
| Learning types: 18+ plus learner responsive: FE Full time courses | | | |

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate | Overall |
| Approximate number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection Full-time learners. | 64 |
| Overall effectiveness | 2 |
| Capacity to improve | 2 |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 |
| 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? | 2 |
| How safe do learners feel? | 1 |
| <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i> | 2 |
| <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i> | NA* |
| Quality of provision | 2 |
| 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? | 1 |
| Leadership and management | 2 |
| 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> | NA* |
| 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? | 2 |
| 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? | 2 |
| How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money? | 2 |

*where applicable to the type of provision

Summary report – professional production skills course

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

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Overall effectiveness of provision | Grade 2 |
|---|----------------|

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Capacity to improve | Grade 2 |
|----------------------------|----------------|

Overall effectiveness

52. Guildford School of Acting (GSA) offers good quality training in professional production skills. At the time of the inspection 71 students were studying on the two-year course, of whom 28 (39%) are in receipt of DaDAs. Most students complete the course and achieve a good standard of work by the time they graduate with their diploma award. The large majority secure employment within six months of leaving the course.
53. The quality of the curriculum and teaching are good and pastoral care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. As a result most students make good progress and by the time they leave the course they are well equipped with a range of professional skills that can be used in many different production roles. Teaching is good and most lessons involve discussions, effective probing questioning and extensive practical tasks that place students in different leadership roles. Leaders have refined the tutorial system for production skills students and they benefit from much more regular reviews of their work and set realistic targets for improvement.
54. Key strengths of the course include the much improved physical teaching spaces, the resource base for production skills students in the Ivy Centre with its own theatre, and the many opportunities for students to learn to work in multiple performance venues both on the university campus, at GSA, in Guildford theatres and touring locally to schools. The extensive, well-planned work placements fully support students' experience of live theatre practice.
55. GSA is well led and managed. Leaders demonstrate good capacity to secure further improvement. The director of GSA and head of production skills work well together and have successfully shaped the current course and revised course starting in September 2012. The team of production skills tutors work well together and the breadth of their expertise is invaluable in giving all students a good experience. Tutors share their expertise well and keep each other abreast of changes encountered in

the industry through their connections and external professional work. This is used well to inform discussion about how to redesign module content and sustain high relevance to the needs of the industry. Leaders have successfully addressed the points for action and recommendations from the last inspection.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What students like:

- the new well-equipped Ivy Arts Centre and theatre as the base for the productions skills students and for regular performance work
- the new GSA building with fantastic new studios and facilities
- good quality teaching and tutors' good use of their own industry expertise which spans all areas of technical production skills
- the detailed production skills curriculum that combines much work with the acting and musical theatre students
- extensive opportunity to work on many GSA productions and increasingly for university events and productions
- extended work placements in the industry
- excellent pastoral care and guidance.

What students would like to see improved:

- more regular communication about the restructuring of the leadership at GSA
- more technical workshop space.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- good professional attitudes of students helping them get the best out of working with industry experts
- realistic understanding and readiness for the demands of pressured rehearsal and performance schedules in the industry
- the good standard of student work
- willingness of leaders to listen to and respond to suggestions from industry practitioners.

What employers would like to see improved:

- there were no recommendations from employers.

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

56. Since the last inspection there have been substantial changes at senior and middle leadership and significant staff turnover as a result of the merger with the University of Surrey and restructuring of GSA. Members of the integration board, including university staff and GSA leaders, have worked tirelessly to ensure that the impact of change is positive. Staff say that communication since last summer is much improved. The new director of GSA is successfully guiding staff through the final stages of the merger and further imminent changes at senior and middle leadership.
57. Changes over the last few years have led to challenges in coordinating and evaluating a robust process for quality assuring teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are good and occasionally outstanding but critical engagement with evidence from lesson observations has not led to a sharply focused review of the impact of teaching on students' progress and overall achievement. Leaders undertake observations of tutors and some observations forms comment usefully about teaching methods. The forms however are lengthy and commentary rarely evaluates students' progress. Leaders are not accustomed to doing joint observations to standardise judgements about the quality of teaching, and few use specific observation criteria to measure the quality of students' learning. Teachers have a wealth of industry experience but few have a formally recognised teaching qualification.

Outcomes for students

Grade 2

58. Students achieve a good standard of work by the end of the course and standards are continuing to improve. Over the last three years retention on the course has improved and most students who finish the end of the second year attain their Trinity diploma. In 2009 the standard of work was highly variable and some students failed to pass the course. Leaders tackled these issues with the course with energy and determined effort, improving pass rates and overall achievement.
59. Recent reports by Trinity College describe students' work as good in most aspects of technical production practice. Students demonstrate confident application of their knowledge, good health and safety risk assessments in their folders, and evidence of good interpersonal skills and confidence to lead others, keeping calm and running technical rehearsals with clear instructions to the cast and crew. Recent reports by Trinity College reinforce the need to continually support students with their written evidence in journals and portfolios as there remains variability in standards of work. A few students require more targeted

tutoring for their professional portfolios and more skill in evaluating their learning from the work placements. Not all tutors encourage the marking up of prompt copies for technical runs.

60. On average over the last three years 80% of graduates secured work within six months of graduating. The majority of graduates secure initial employment with their placement provider and destination data show a national work profile. Typical jobs over recent years include assistant and deputy stage manager, sound engineers, assistant lighting designers and flymen for regional repertory theatres, touring shows and some live event work such as festivals and commercial work. The option to extend the two-year training for a further year is attractive for many students and just over 40% each year remain at GSA to pursue a third year and convert from diploma into a degree award. Leaders are beginning to collate and track destinations more comprehensively. Even so there is limited scheduling to contact alumni to capture data at certain points each year. The evidence of alumni achievements is not used well enough to evaluate the impact of the acting training on outcomes for students over time.
61. Leaders have secured much improved attendance and punctuality of production skills students, setting realistic and high industry standard expectations for all students. There is a very good work ethic amongst students. Most students appreciate how their professional attitudes and conduct, which are highly visible when they are scheduled on work experience placements, are key indicators of their industry potential,.
62. Students are selected from competitive interviews and students told inspectors the key reasons for applying were the very good facilities at GSA and at the Ivy Centre, and the opportunity to be part of a campus-based university. Students receive good induction to their course and most make good progress from their starting points. Leaders do not track students' progress in a systematic way that captures how well each student meets or exceeds their potential judged at audition.
63. Students feel safe and exceptionally well cared for. The production team are rigorous in helping all students learn quickly about health and safety and industry standards as a critical part of the training. Students work safely in taught classes, running rehearsals and productions, and attention to health and safety permeates their work. Leaders have adjusted work schedules to make sure students do not feel over pressured and work long hours without appropriate breaks. Work with acting and musical theatre students is much improved and there is far greater collaboration than previously. The new GSA building and the Ivy Centre opposite help bring students together more socially and in their production schedules. The student community recognise this and appreciate the difference this has made compared to the former, more dispersed GSA teaching sites across the town.

64. Students receive good preparation for their future economic well-being through an extensive performance schedule and very good opportunity to work with a range of directors for productions. Production skills students do need more detailed guidance about career progression in the industry. Leaders have improved the use of industry experts and the taught sessions for professional development are gradually being improved.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

65. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Lessons are characterised by good use of tutors' professional industry experience and good use of important theoretical concepts that underpin processes taught and used creatively. There is good attention paid to helping students learn key skills and then allowing them time to use these in various problem-solving tasks. Teachers use good targeted questioning to check learning and cite examples from their experiences to give students further insight before they attend work placements.
66. In an outstanding lesson for computer aided design (CAD) the tutor's expertise was critical in coaching student through complex technical features of CAD. The use of well-designed resources for the lesson gave students the chance to work at a different pace to each other. The tutor used formative assessment well, checking learning through very good interaction and individual guidance.
67. Evidence in students' portfolio work shows a broad range of satisfactory to outstanding achievement in detailing the roles, experiences and production designs used for various projects. Excellent work shows very good critical reflection about their skills used in, for example, problem solving when doing pre-tour visits to local schools to stage productions. The most thoughtful work captures what students learn and reuse from many different experiences. This is not a consistent feature in all work.
68. The module descriptions are clear and the sequence of learning outcomes and content over two years is well planned. The transposing of learning outcomes into tightly focused lesson plans to meet students' differing needs is less secure. Some lesson planning is too dense with aims, objectives and outcomes that do not address how to maximise students' progress. This means that the pace of learning slows because students are not encouraged to work independently, explore their own ideas, work with peers or challenge key approaches and why they are used. In the production skills course the use of peer assessment is underdeveloped and students would benefit from more opportunity to critique each others' work.

69. Summative assessment is very good and modules include clear descriptions of marking criteria. The marking schemes are clear although evidence for some modules shows that there are a few students who do not submit reflective journals as a key component of each of the production modules, failing to recognise the value of documenting their work and reflecting upon their own progress. Feedback from external examiners is positive about improving standards of achievement. Tracking of students' targets from summative assessments to feed into planning and teaching over time is not always consistent amongst tutors.
70. The curriculum is good and provides students with a thorough grounding in the core disciplines of stage management, sound and lighting design construction, and students benefit from guidance about effective use of voice to lead others. Students receive an excellent course in health and safety and are fully aware of the attention to industry standards in fit-ups, technical runs and in productions to ensure the safety of crew and cast. The workshop space is appropriately equipped but welding for designs is not possible at the moment because students do not have access to a metal workshop. The workshop is shared between students and the university services, which leaders accept is not ideal and is under review.
71. GSA has sustained outstanding relationships with industry professionals, local schools and community organisations to enrich students' learning. A critical part of the training is undertaking extended work placements and many work in London venues such as at The Royal Court, the National Theatre and the Orange Tree, or secure placements in local venues, especially enjoying the chance to work in productions at The Ivy on campus and at Guildford theatres. The monitoring and quality assurance of placements is supported through the collation of risk assessments and all documents pertaining to insurance and liability before students attend their placements. Leaders use their professional connections to secure placements for students and share their knowledge well. Leaders have yet to secure a planned series of development visits to each placement venue to practically test out the quality of training and feedback to students.
72. Pastoral guidance and welfare support are outstanding. GSA students benefit from equal access to the extensive student support services offered by the university. Students are rightly pleased with provision for health needs through the onsite medical centre. Leaders support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through good tutorial support and good communication with the central university services for additional learning support. Student records are not always updated with information on how students receiving additional support are progressing. Students with dyslexia would benefit from more support.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

73. Leadership and management of the production skills course are good. The recent appointment of a head of production skills has significantly helped this course move forward. Her work with the staff team has consolidated the vision for the course. The team has achieved much success in taking the course through the university requirements for periodic review. Leaders and teaching staff are making sure that the training capitalises upon the fantastic new facilities for production skills students both in the new Ivy Arts Centre and the main GSA building.
74. The nature of the training means that tutors are frequently team teaching which brings good benefit to students, especially in preparing for productions in-house and at external venues. Tutors share ideas well about how different modules of the course are progressing, especially in supporting the acting and musical theatre third-year performance work. The production skills department meet regularly and in preparing for periodic review with the university and responding to recommendations by Trinity College and NCDT, there is evidence of thorough discussion in redesigning the modules of the course.
75. Self-assessment grades are generous but in discussion leaders show a good understanding of strengths and areas requiring further development. The cycle of course evaluation and action planning takes good account of staff and student feedback and reports by external assessors from Trinity College. Leaders have yet to get to grips with how to secure a robust evaluation of students' progress based on the targets for each student or the cohort as a whole. For this reason leaders and teaching teams are not sufficiently focused on assessing how well students are learning in lessons or how teachers are working with educational principles that promote good or better learning.
76. The self-assessment document and action plans are insufficiently supported by evaluative quantitative data such as analysis of trends for applications and enrolments, retention, achievement over time and progression of alumni in the industry. This is a priority for improvement in securing a more rigorous foundation for development planning and linking evaluation back to outcomes for students.
77. Communication with staff has improved. There is greater confidence in leaders, better staff morale and a more optimistic vision that staff are wholly committed to after a period of uncertainty. Most students judge that their views about the course are sought by leaders and feel that suggestions are acted upon to improve the course.
78. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Students treat each other with respect and fairness within their competitive training.

Students say discriminatory incidents are rare. Students from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds work well together. Data show no difference in achievement by gender, ethnicity, or by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Leaders are at the initial stages of tracking outcomes and destinations by student groups.

79. Arrangements to keep students safe are good. Studios are monitored closely in meeting statutory health and safety guidelines. GSA's merger with the university brings substantial benefit financially and in resourcing for student support, study and staff development. GSA makes effective use of the new building with excellent studio facilities, complemented by the new Ivy Arts Centre for performance work. GSA provides good value for money.

What does Guildford School of Acting need to do to improve further?

- Develop the capacity of middle leaders so that all leaders focus on quality assuring teaching and learning, with a strategically planned cycle of lesson observations designed to continually improve teaching practices.
- Ensure that all leaders have the capacity to evaluate the impact of individual disciplines and departments against measurable outcomes for students. Bring about much more critical engagement with data to determine trends and implications of this for evaluation and action planning.
- Engage all leaders in a robust cycle of lesson observations so that leaders can standardise their judgements and discuss how to maximise students' progress in individual lessons and over time.
- Enable more teachers to gain a formal teaching qualification and develop a community of rigorous pedagogical debate to drive teaching from good to consistently outstanding.
- Provide all final year students with an intensive taught course and supplementary tutoring to prepare them fully for demanding auditions and interviews, and develop necessary research and literacy skills to produce high quality final-year portfolios.
- Provide all leaders with alumni information on a regular basis and ensure this is used effectively to analyse the career trajectory of graduates.

| Record of main findings | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------|---------------|
| Provider name | Guildford School of Acting: Diploma in Professional Production Skills | Inspection number | 376309 |
| Learning types: 18+ plus learner responsive: FE Full time courses | | | |

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate | Overall |
| Approximate number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection Full-time learners. | 71 |
| Overall effectiveness | 2 |
| Capacity to improve | 2 |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 |
| 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? | 2 |
| How safe do learners feel? | 1 |
| <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i> | 2 |
| <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i> | NA* |
| Quality of provision | 2 |
| 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? | 1 |
| Leadership and management | 2 |
| 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> | NA* |
| 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? | 2 |
| 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? | 2 |
| How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money? | 2 |

*where applicable to the type of provision

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the deputy director of studies and head of production skills as nominees, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of reports by the qualification awarding body, Trinity College, London, the previous inspection report, GSA's most recent self-assessment report, development plans and data on students' achievement.

Inspectors observed lessons including several joint observations spanning all three of the diploma courses. The lead inspector met with groups of students to gain their views. Inspectors conducted meetings with leaders and teaching staff. Inspectors considered the views of students in recent feedback questionnaires.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
7th Floor
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2012