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Professor Simon Ofield-Kerr  
Vice Chancellor  
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Dear Professor Ofield-Kerr

### **Short inspection of University of the Creative Arts – further education provision**

Following the short inspection on 13 and 14 January 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in November 2011.

#### **This provider continues to be good.**

Learners on further education courses at the university continue to receive a very good arts education across all four campuses and the vast majority complete their courses successfully. Teaching in visual arts provides a broad range of stimulating activities and experiences that enable learners to develop highly individual and creative responses to assignment briefs and identify personal areas of interest for further exploration.

Managers have implemented study programmes for younger learners well so that learners acquire very good specialist skills and knowledge that enable them to progress well to higher education (HE) courses in a wide range of specialist art and design disciplines. Leaders have managed the overall provision very well to sustain high quality in the context of reduced funding for learners aged over 18.

Managers identify accurately areas of provision which require further improvement and take appropriate actions to remedy identified weaknesses. Outcomes for younger learners on two-year diploma courses and for adults on Access to HE courses have improved markedly since the last inspection. All campuses are well resourced, and learners benefit from working in well-equipped studios and workshops alongside higher-education students.

## **Safeguarding is effective.**

Learners feel very safe on the university campuses; those interviewed were very clear on how to report any concerns and where to seek advice or support if needed. Learners receive clear guidance on how to stay safe online and when using social media; tutors reinforce this regularly through project briefs when learners are working online to research or develop ideas and imagery.

Managers carry out suitable pre-employment checks on all staff who work directly with further education learners, and provide regular training for staff to ensure that they understand their responsibilities for keeping learners safe. Tutors and technicians promote safe working practices in studios and workshops, so that learners know how to use materials, tools and equipment safely.

Effective working with external partners has enabled leaders to make a good start in responding to the recently introduced 'Prevent' duty. Key managers and staff have attended training on preventing radicalisation and extremism, and a programme of online training is being implemented across the university. Staff and governors have a good understanding of their responsibilities in this area; managers acknowledge that there is more to do to enhance learners' understanding of the potential risks posed by radicalisation and extremism.

## **Inspection findings**

- Learners achieve very well on the vast majority of courses. Success rates on the foundation diploma in art and design are high at Farnham and Rochester, and exceptionally high at Canterbury, where a very high proportion of learners also achieve merit and distinction grades. Success rates were lower on the foundation course at Epsom in 2014/15; managers have substantially revised the course management, structure and the teaching team to secure improvement.
- Since the previous inspection, significantly more learners on the two-year advanced-level diploma courses at Canterbury and Rochester successfully complete their courses. Managers are investigating the reasons why fewer learners on the advanced-level diploma course at Rochester achieve merit and distinction grades, compared to those at Canterbury. Retention rates for Access to HE courses are now consistently high across the three campuses which offer this course.
- Consistently good, and often outstanding, teaching on the visual arts programmes ensures that learners make excellent progress, as evidenced in their high-quality practical work, sketchbooks and blogs. Learners talk confidently and purposefully about their work and acquire the necessary practical and technical skills and knowledge to realise their intentions. They understand how to improve their work as a result of the effective and useful feedback, for example through group critiques in lessons and tutorial reviews.

- Managers have taken appropriate actions to ensure that any learners aged 16 to 18 who join the university without grade C in GCSE English or mathematics are enrolled on a suitable qualification. Teaching for English and mathematics is provided by a subcontracted organisation; in 2014/15, a high turnover of teachers adversely affected learners' progress and too few learners achieved functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics.
- Since then leaders have appointed a new provider and university managers monitor the quality of provision and learners' progress through regular review meetings with subcontractor staff and conducting joint lesson observations. Managers are confident that the current arrangements are supporting learners' progress more effectively, but acknowledge that teaching in English and mathematics sessions is not consistently of the same high standard as across the rest of the provision. A minority of learners did not receive sufficiently useful feedback on their progress in English and mathematics to help them make the progress of which they were capable.
- Learners participate regularly in a wide range of activities which develops their understanding of working in the creative industries and prepares them well for progression to specialist higher education, training or employment. Learners participate regularly in gallery and studio visits in the UK and abroad and attend sessions with visiting professionals; opportunities to work alongside higher education students and tutors and to attend taster sessions on different campuses ensure that learners are well informed about future choices.
- Good advice and guidance and individual support in preparing HE applications and portfolios ensures that the great majority of learners gain a place in their first choice of university. Staff provide appropriate guidance for the small minority of learners who do not intend to progress to HE. Tutors make very good use of their professional networks and contacts to help learners gain direct experience of working with creative practitioners within their chosen specialism. However, learners and tutors do not comprehensively record and evaluate work-related activities or skills development.
- Learners develop a strong social awareness through projects which tackle current social and/or political themes, and often explore challenging and controversial subject matter in their work. For example, a learner produced a 'fanzine' that focused on homelessness, including contributions from homeless people, and used the profits from the sale of the publication to set up a charity and provide blankets for homeless people. University managers have worked closely with the student union to revise policies and procedures for approving external speakers and events on campus. However, further education learners interviewed did not recall any specific focus on preventing radicalisation or extremism as part of their course.

- Managers use performance information well to evaluate the quality of provision. They identify accurately any areas requiring further improvement, although the evaluation of teaching and learning in the self-assessment report focuses more on the peer review process than on the particular strengths and areas for improvement in teaching, learning and assessment. Tutors use the peer review system well to identify strengths and areas for development in their own and their colleagues' practice and to share ideas and strategies to improve across a broad range of teaching practice, including assessment and curriculum planning.
- Managers recognise that peer reviews focus more on teaching than learning, and have recently introduced studio survey sessions to strengthen the evaluation of learning and learners' progress. The first reports from this new process identify clearly what practical, technical and personal skills learners are developing, and how well teachers manage large groups and work in teams; reports do not yet explicitly evaluate the impact of teaching on learning as well as they should.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- managers evaluate fully the reasons why fewer advanced-level diploma learners achieve merit and distinction grades at Rochester than at Canterbury, and monitor carefully the extent of learners' progress from their different starting points
- the changes made to the structure, management and teaching of the foundation diploma course at Epsom enable learners on this campus to achieve as well as their peers on other sites
- the revised arrangements for English and mathematics enable learners to improve their skills and gain qualifications in these subjects
- the peer review and studio survey systems evaluate clearly the impact of teaching and assessment on learners' progress
- tutors and learners record and evaluate the extent and impact of work-related learning on 16 to 18 study programmes
- staff continue to work with learner representatives to devise suitable approaches to promote learners' understanding of risks posed by radicalisation and extremism.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mercer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted inspectors were assisted by the university's Head of School for Further Education, as nominee. Inspectors met with members of the leadership team, university managers, course leaders, teachers, learners, managers from the subcontractor for English and mathematics provision and held a telephone discussion with the link governor for the further education provision. Inspectors observed taught studio sessions and reviewed learners' portfolios and assessed work. They reviewed key strategic and policy documents, including those relating to quality assurance and performance monitoring, safeguarding and curriculum planning.