

Thames Valley University

Reinspection report

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Type of provider: Higher Education institution

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Information about the provider

1. Thames Valley University (TVU) provides higher and further education (FE) in a number of campuses across West London and the Thames Valley. FE provision is mainly sited in Reading, but some programmes take place in Ealing, Slough and Brentford. The University has around 7,500 learners taking FE courses, over 60% of whom are part-time. FE programmes are offered in 14 of the 15 subject areas. Over half the enrolments are in four subject areas: health, public services and care; arts, media and publishing; languages, literature and culture; and preparation for life and work.
2. Reading unitary authority has a population of around 140,000. A third of the FE learners are aged 16 to 18 and just over half of all the learners are from White British backgrounds. Over a third of the learners are from minority ethnic groups, which is greater than the proportion found locally. Unemployment, at around 6%, is lower than the current English average. There are, however, wards with areas of multiple deprivation in Reading. In 2009, 70% of the school leavers in Reading obtained five or more high grade passes at GCSE, which is five percentage points above the English average. Many of the secondary schools in the area have sixth forms.
3. The University is to divest itself of FE provision and the Reading campus is being restructured to become an FE college under the aegis of Oxford and Cherwell Valley College in the next year. Management of the FE programmes is now more locally based as the provision reverts to more familiar college-style leadership and management. The sixth form academy manages provision such as General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS and A levels. In addition 14 to 16 part-time programmes are in place for local pupils. Almost 200 apprentices, most of whom are on construction programmes, are currently in training, along with 1,000 Train to Gain learners. In addition, the university is collaborating with local secondary schools on seven Diploma programmes.
4. At the previous inspection in 2009 the FE provision was found to be inadequate. Achievement and standards, along with leadership and management, were found to be unsatisfactory. Provision in visual arts and business, administration and law were judged to be unsatisfactory.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: 14 to16	897 part-time learners
Further education (16 to18)	2,059 full-time learners 452 part-time learners

Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment	504 full-time learners 159 part-time learners 149 learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	791 full-time learners 2,805 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	1,101 learners 239 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	
Construction	3
Visual arts	3
English and modern foreign languages	3
Literacy and numeracy	2
Business, administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

- The FE provision at Thames Valley University is satisfactory. Managers, staff and governors have successfully improved this provision, which was judged unsatisfactory at the previous inspection. Success rates have improved over the past two years and are now at national averages. Learners' progress, as measured by qualification pass rates and value added data, is also satisfactory. Inspectors judged curriculum provision in visual arts and business, administration and law as satisfactory, along with English and modern foreign languages and construction. Literacy and numeracy programmes were found to be good. Managers and staff have addressed most weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. However, the FE self-assessment report, regarded as accurate by inspectors, judged the sixth form academy to be unsatisfactory.

6. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and learners generally enjoy their studies. The lesson observation system is now much more rigorous and is beginning to bring about improvements. Managers have greatly improved collaborative partnership working with the local authority, secondary schools and employers. They have also extensively reviewed the FE curriculum, which still meets local needs successfully. Care, guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. However, support for learners with additional learning needs is good. Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory but not yet sufficiently promoted across curriculum areas and in work-based learning.
7. Quality assurance is rigorous and curriculum reviews are broadly accurate. The self-assessment report for the FE provision is evaluative, clearly written and accurately identifies key strengths and areas for improvement. Currently, FE programmes represent satisfactory value for money, but the immediate future of the provision is still uncertain.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Over the past two years success rates have improved to national averages. Attainment for school pupils aged 14 to 16 is good. It is satisfactory in vocational provision and work-based learning. However, attainment in the sixth form academy, especially at GCSE and AS level, remains below national averages.
- Of the five curriculum areas inspected, none was judged unsatisfactory and both reinspected areas have improved. Inspectors found provision in literacy and numeracy to be good.
- Learners' achievements are broadly in line with those predicted from their prior attainment. Outcomes for learners on key and functional skills programmes are good. Learners feel safe on both sites and make satisfactory contributions to local communities. Health and safety is appropriately promoted in studios, workshops and more broadly across the campuses.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons are generally well planned and provide varied activities. However, too few lessons cater for the full range of learners' needs, or provide appropriate challenge to maintain their interest and enable them to make better progress.
- The college has improved its lesson observation scheme since the last inspection. Observations are now thorough and accurate. Managers moderate effectively the judgements on the quality of lessons, and address actions for improvement well through specific support and further training. They monitor and review progress on these actions well; improvements can already be seen.
- The range of provision is good and effectively meets the needs and interests of learners and employers. Recent changes made to the curriculum have been based on a clear rationale. Where managers have closed courses, they have replaced them with appropriate alternative provision.

- Working relationships and partnerships with the local authority and schools are good. Staff work closely with Connexions and schools to ensure that pupils have a smooth transition to FE courses. Managers acknowledge that more work needs to be done to further develop partnerships with employers.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. There is, however, good additional learning support for learners. Teachers' and tutors' use of individual learning plans is inconsistent across the provision, and much of their target setting in learners' reviews is poor.
- Leadership and management are much improved and are now satisfactory. Leaders at all levels have been re-invigorated by being granted more autonomy to lead and manage the FE provision. In a climate of necessary financial stringency and uncertainty, morale amongst staff and learners has nevertheless been lifted. Consequently, staff have rapidly pursued many actions to improve provision, although there is still much more to be done.
- Managers and teams have much improved self-assessment and quality assurance, including the use of performance data. Their identification of particular areas of concern, and more perceptive analysis of teaching and learning, underpin the recent positive changes. Leaders have subjected actions to continuous monitoring so that they have a thorough and accurate knowledge of where things have improved and what still needs to be done.
- Governance has not, historically, served the needs and interests of the FE community adequately. This deficiency has been recently rectified by the additional of two co-opted governors to the FE sub-committee of the board. The full board now take more account of the needs of the FE provision. However, the longer-term interests of the FE provision still lack representative advocacy as the negotiations for a joint venture with a neighbouring partner college enter a critical phase.

What does college need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that activities and effective questioning challenge and meet the needs of all learners, and enable them to make better progress and improve their level of achievement.
- Continue to develop partnership links with employers in order to increase relevant training opportunities in the local community.
- Identify and share existing good practice in the use of individual learning plans to promote learners' learning and progress.
- Using more focused and specific target setting, further promote the progress and confidence of learners.
- Ensure that the current resources and newly granted autonomy of the FE provision in Reading are diligently protected during the formal divestment from TVU and the establishment of the proposed joint venture with a partner college.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- feeling safe on both main campuses, including car parks
- modern surroundings and good equipment
- helpful induction week
- advice and guidance from customer services
- supportive and understanding teachers
- the way their opinions are listened to
- using E-tracker to monitor progress
- being treated as adults
- 'catch up' week.

What learners would like to see improved:

- amount of social space
- length of time spent on workshop sessions rather than lectures
- action to stop people spitting on the campus
- medical provision available on site
- warmth of some rooms
- trips and activities to support their studies
- opportunities to sample other crafts
- speed of ICT hardware in engineering.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- responsiveness of the college to training needs
- training is job related
- professional behaviour of staff.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

8. The FE provision in Reading, currently managed by TVU, has good capacity to improve. The nature and scale of the improvements accomplished in just over a year since the last inspection are a tribute to the staff. Strategic and operational management have significantly improved in a short time and are now securely focused on the needs of the learners. The vice-chancellor's bold decision to give the FE provision more independence within the university has led to significant and rapid change. This opportunity has been grasped with passion and diligence by the FE leaders, who have been relentless in their determination to improve outcomes for learners. All unsatisfactory aspects of the provision identified at the last inspection are now satisfactory. Success rates show a consistent trend of improvement and are now broadly at national averages. Managers have employed rigorous self-assessment, and set ambitious targets for particular areas of concern, using internal notices to improve and regular reviews of the interim performance of every course. Inspectors confirmed the accuracy of the self-assessment report, indicating that several subject areas within the FE provision are now good. High morale, motivation, confidence and professional pride are hallmarks of the staff, as is the trust they have in their present leaders to steer the FE provision towards a more successful future. Learners and employers are also contributing well to the changing shape of the college community.
9. These improvements have taken place against a background of financial stringency. The FE provision has had to make operational savings of nearly two million pounds and reduce its teaching complement by 30 full-time equivalent staff. In addition corporate functions, such as human resources are being developed at local level. The governors, FE leaders and the vice- and deputy vice-chancellor acknowledge that there is still much to be done to ensure that the FE provision secures from the divestment process the best possible outcomes for the future interests of learners in Reading.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

10. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates have improved over the past two years and were broadly at national averages for general further education colleges in 2008/09. Rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on foundation programmes were five percentage points above national average, while those for adults were satisfactory. At intermediate level, success rates also improved in 2008/09 to just above national averages. However, success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 on GCSE courses declined and were just below national averages. At advanced level, success rates for adult learners and those aged 16 to 18 also improved in 2008/09. However, success rates for 16 to 18-year-old learners on GCE AS- and A-level programmes were still below average.

11. The completion of framework and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), within the agreed timescales for apprentices and other trainees was broadly satisfactory in 2008/09. Overall success rates for learners taking key skills and the functional skills pilot were good and above national averages. Achievements for school pupils aged 14 to 16 on part-time vocational courses were good.
12. Retention has also improved and is broadly at national averages. However, retention for learners aged 16 to 18 on intermediate courses, although improved, was below national averages in 2008/09. Pass rates have improved and are satisfactory, except for school pupils aged 14 to 16, for whom pass rates were high in 2008/09. The proportion of high grades on GCE A-, AS-level and GCSE programmes was low.
13. Learners' progress is generally satisfactory. Value added data show that learners attain test and examination grades at levels predicted from their prior attainment. Most learners enjoy their training or programmes of study and gain in confidence and in practical employability skills. Teachers and managers have implemented strategies to improve attendance and retention and the careful monitoring of attendance is beginning to have a positive impact. Learners' attendance has improved over the past two years and is now satisfactory. Learners report that they feel safe on the two FE sites, including the car parks. Safe working practices were observed in studios, workshops and classrooms during the inspection.
14. Learners are increasingly making a positive contribution to local communities. A good number of learners on two-year programmes are mentors for other learners, a scheme which is recognised by the Millennium Volunteers. In addition, learners are actively involved in raising money for charities through Red Nose Day and Children in Need. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities regularly hold cake sales to raise money for charity.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

15. Inspectors agree with the self-assessment report's judgement that teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners enjoy their time at the college and speak highly of their supportive teachers. Most lessons are well planned and structured to include appropriate activities that promote learning and maintain learners' interest. However, too few sessions ensure that activities and course materials are differentiated to meet learners' diverse needs. In the better lessons, individualised and challenging activities engage and motivate learners well and enable them to make good progress. Effective group work enables learners to gain good team-working skills. However, too often there was the insufficient challenge to learners. This was evident in the slow pace of some lessons, and untargeted questioning which resulted in learners losing interest and making less progress than they should.
16. Resources for learning are generally good. The provision of information learning technologies (ILT) has improved. However, its use to support learning in

lessons varies across subject areas. Learners speak positively about their increasing use of the virtual learning environment to catch up on missed work or to research extra resources to support their learning. The teaching of key skills and functional skills is improving and rooted well in the vocational subject areas. Learners are made well aware of the college's policy on equality of opportunity during their induction. However, too few teachers promote diversity sufficiently through lessons and reviews.

17. The college has recently improved its lesson observation scheme, which is now clearly linked to staff development. Tutorials are observed with the same rigour as other lessons. Lesson observations are thorough and accurate, and lead to detailed action plans for improvement. Managers are aware of previous over-grading and have implemented robust standardisation and moderation procedures. A wide programme of staff development activities is available, focused on improving teaching and learning. This is supported well by effective advanced practitioners and the recently developed 'teacher's toolkit'.
18. Teachers conduct effective initial assessment of learners' needs for additional support, but the role of support assistants in lessons is often unclear. They carry out thorough internal verification, which complies with awarding body requirements and ensures that assessment of learners' work is accurate. Teachers usually provide prompt feedback to learners on their performance. In some curriculum areas, guidance on how learners could improve their grades is detailed. However, in others it is scarce and insufficient attention is paid to correcting spelling and grammar.
19. The range of provision is good and effectively meets the needs and interests of learners and employers. Recent changes have been clearly thought through. Where managers have closed courses, they have replaced them with appropriate alternative provision. The curriculum successfully promotes progression between levels and modes of study. The FE provision has played a central role in the development of Diplomas with local schools. Curriculum developments include a strong focus on flexible and accessible provision to attract and meet the needs of foundation level learners. The college has responded well to employer requests for bespoke provision. Short course provision includes meeting the language needs of British Army Ghurkha families. Enrichment activities are satisfactory.
20. Working relationships and partnerships with local schools are very good. The 14–19 Partnership and 14–19 Strategic Partnership Boards have proved central to the provision of enhanced and alternative curriculum for school pupils. Staff work closely with Connexions and local schools to ensure a smooth transition between school and college. Information is effectively shared. The recent appointment of a transition worker has strengthened this process. The FE provision is responsible for the management of sixth form programmes at a girls' school in Reading committed to the promotion of vocational education for young women. There are productive links with the Ministry of Defence, the local National Health Service and an electricity supply company which have resulted in increased work-based training for local people. In addition, senior managers

have successfully contributed to a local economy group to develop skills training in a nearby shopping centre. However, the college has not developed sufficient partnership links with employers.

21. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. There is, however, good additional support for learners. The success rates for learners in receipt of additional learning support are in line with the success rates of their peers. All learners complete an initial assessment, and where a support need is identified, appropriate and timely support is provided by qualified staff. Teachers and tutors do not use individual learning plans (ILP) consistently to monitor and record the effectiveness of support. Inspectors judged learning plans and target setting as good in visual arts and literacy and numeracy provision. However, in other areas, teachers and tutors often set poor targets for learners during their reviews, which are frequently bland, and do not relate well to the target qualification.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

22. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall and good in provision for school pupils aged 14 to 16. Since the last inspection senior managers have radically changed the FE provision in TVU for the better. The vice-chancellor and university governors recently acknowledged that the FE provision had failed to thrive under its integrated management structure. They have recently granted the executive director of further education and his leadership team the autonomy to make and execute decisions of direct and immediate benefit to learners. Success rates show a marked improvement, and are now just around the national averages for further education colleges. Managers have significantly revised the curriculum in order to raise overall performance and become more financially sustainable. Leaders at all levels are reinvigorated: they know the extent of their authority and responsibility, with the consequence that they are newly empowered to direct change and manage improvement strategies. Staff morale is high. The change of culture to one of confident, consultative, distributed leadership and mutual professional respect is evident. The two subject areas that were inadequate at the last inspection are now satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy and a number of other areas not inspected in detail on this occasion, are good. One area – the sixth form academy – has improved but remains unsatisfactory.
23. Aspirations are realistic: staff know that much is still to be done to secure for the learners of Reading a consistently high quality of provision. There is still too much variation in quality across the FE provision and pockets of poorer practice remain. Not all changes have had the impact that was intended and others are too recent to judge the impact. Teaching has improved but not enough, and until very recently managers could not be wholly confident of the reliability of lesson observations in a few areas. Self-assessment at all levels, however, is now more comprehensive and rigorous, with mechanisms for moderation and validation ensuring that every aspect of provision and outcome is subject to

scrutiny. The shrewd use of reliable data is now a fully embedded feature of most interim course reviews and target setting. Plans of action, broad performance indicators and specific targets at curriculum and departmental level all follow from the continuous evaluation cycle that is now firmly established.

24. Governance of the FE provision has been strengthened and is satisfactory. In particular, the appointment of two additional governors to the FE sub-committee of the university's board of governors with extensive relevant expertise has brought an entirely new level of challenge and support to bear. The work of this sub-committee is contributing significantly to the process of improvement. The present and future interests of FE within the overall framework of the board of governors are now well represented. However, at present, there is insufficient advocacy for the further education provision in the overall divestment process.
25. Arrangements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults are satisfactory, and meet statutory requirements. Managers are assiduous in ensuring that all staff who are subject to these requirements receive appropriate levels of scrutiny. All learners who voluntarily disclose a criminal record are risk assessed before enrolment, and necessary safeguards put in place. Staff training on child protection has been successfully completed and health and safety is also well promoted across the provision. Recently the provision was awarded the Association of Colleges Beacon Award for work placements for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
26. The promotion of equality and diversity has improved and is satisfactory. Processes of recruitment, induction, training and curriculum design all recognise the importance of confronting any unfair discrimination and more fully embracing all features of a diverse society. The university meets all its statutory obligations in respect of race, disability and gender, and implements its single equality policy effectively. It is highly socially inclusive and links with minority ethnic community leaders are productive. A number of initiatives are starting to have significant impact in parts of the local community that have traditionally been harder to engage in education and training. Analysis of relative educational outcomes for groups of learners of different ethnic origin has revealed the lower success rates achieved by, for example, learners of Black African and Chinese backgrounds. FE leaders have reacted decisively to research possible reasons for this and staff are working hard to close identified achievement gaps. Opportunities to teach, endorse or celebrate diversity in lessons and other activities are not, however, always taken forward.
27. Learners and employers enjoy productive dialogue with teachers, tutors and managers. The learners' representative forum is a recent initiative but has already contributed to how the FE community is run. Almost all the learners and employers who wrote or spoke to inspectors confirmed that what they had to say was listened to and acted upon. Employers value their close relations with TVU, but more could be done to extend the reach of this part of the business.

28. Resources are managed effectively and almost all learners benefit from a stimulating learning environment. FE leaders have managed a sharply declining budget towards a sustainable level of funding, while simultaneously improving learners' success rates to around the national averages. This represents satisfactory value for money.

Subject areas

Construction

Grade 3

Context

29. There are 190 learners aged 16 to 18 and 124 adult learners on a variety of construction craft, technician and mechanical engineering services programmes, from foundation through to advanced level. Of these, 84 learners are on foundation, 93 on intermediate and 23 on advanced craft courses. There are 66 mechanical services and 48 technician learners. In addition there are 59 school pupils aged 14 to 16 taking part-time courses, 76 apprentices, 20 advanced apprentices and 80 people on Train to Gain programmes.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. In 2008/09, success rates were high on advanced NVQ in wood occupations, the mechanical engineering services intermediate NVQ in heating and ventilation, and the construction foundation award.
- Strategies to improve retention have been implemented and are beginning to have an impact. Retention on the majority of programmes is satisfactory, and improved in 2008/09 on the construction award and the intermediate wood occupations course.
- Success rates for work-based learners, including those completed within the agreed timescales, are satisfactory. The proportion of work-based learners who achieved the full framework or NVQ declined in 2008/09, but remained broadly in line with national rates.
- Teaching and learning are good. Most teachers effectively relate examples to learners' experiences and the everyday world. Interactive whiteboards, IT facilities and artefacts are well used to promote learners' understanding.
- Most theory lessons incorporate a variety of activities to meet differing learning preferences, although individualised learning is not fully developed. Practical sessions include good use of demonstrations and learners practising new techniques.
- Teachers provide encouraging feedback to motivate learners and to highlight areas for improvement performance. However, in both theory and practical sessions teachers do not use questioning techniques effectively, or routinely, to check understanding.
- Learners develop good vocational and personal skills. They successfully extend their knowledge, understanding and skills applicable to the construction industry. Currently one apprentice is to represent the United Kingdom at the World Skills Olympics. Work-based learners' confidence and self-esteem have improved and they now have a wider scope of work available to them.

- Assessment is satisfactory. The progress of learners on full- and part-time courses in Reading is well monitored. Workplace assessments are regular and are sensitive to employers' needs. However, there is poor coordination of on- and off-the-job training for apprenticeships. Employers have insufficient overview of the college training programmes to plan what needs to be practised in the workplace.
- Individual learning plans are satisfactory overall, but the quality of target setting is inadequate in work-based learning. Targets are imprecise and at times contradictory and are not revised or signed off at subsequent reviews. They are not used to monitor the progress of learners through their qualifications in a timely manner.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Quality improvement plans identify areas for improvement and are monitored and updated three times a year. Significant staff development has taken place to improve the quality of teaching and learning and inspectors agreed with the area's view on teaching and learning.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. There is strong promotion at induction. However, there is insufficient reinforcement during coursework, tutorials or at work-based learning progress reviews. Equality and diversity issues are only discussed and recorded where a problem is identified.
- The safeguarding of learners is satisfactory. Health and safety are well promoted in both practical and theory sessions, with a strong emphasis placed on the importance of safe working practices. In theory sessions staff make appropriate reference to safe working practices in the industry and the importance of risk assessments.

What does TVU need to do to improve further?

- Improve the checking of learners' understanding by the use of more directed and probing questions and a greater variety of assessment methods.
- In order to improve outcomes, ensure that activities in lessons and assessments are planned to respond to the needs of all learners.
- Ensure that communication with employers fully informs them about off-the-job activities and the progress learners are making.
- Improve review procedures and trainers' confidence in target setting in work-based learning in order to monitor learners' progress more thoroughly.
- Ensure all staff are trained to have the confidence to increase the promotion of equality and diversity within training and progress reviews to promote learner and employer awareness.
- Make better use of naturally occurring opportunities in learning sessions to encourage learners to discuss the equality and diversity issues particularly relevant to working in the construction industry.

Visual arts

Grade 3

Context

30. Visual arts programmes currently have 311 full-time and 51 part-time learners. Fifty-eight learners are studying GCE A level in a range of subjects. Courses also include the BTEC first diploma and national diplomas in fine art, 3D design, fashion and photography. In addition, adult learners study the access to higher education art and design course.

Key findings

- Attainment in 2008/09 was very high in A-level art and design, the national diploma in fine art and the diploma in foundation studies. However, some courses such as fashion and clothing and the national diploma in 3D design showed poor achievement and were significantly below the national average.
- Retention is low on all courses except access to higher education and the national diploma in fine art. In the week of inspection, attendance was good.
- The progress of learners who complete advanced programmes is broadly in line with that predicted from their prior attainment. However, progress at AS-level is lower than predicted, especially in AS photography.
- The standard of learners' work in art, photography and sculpture is good and the work is often displayed around the campuses. Recently, some photographic work by learners has been commissioned by local businesses for advertising.
- Progression from advanced courses is good and, in 2008/09, most learners gained places at their first-choice university. Progression from foundation to intermediate level within the college is also good. Specialist information and guidance from their tutors to inform their choices is very effective.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners participate enthusiastically in activities and their understanding is regularly checked with open questions. Assignments which are interesting and present challenges to learners result in a good standard of work. Where lessons have good pace, the energetic contributions from both teachers and learners lead to good progress. Teachers have high expectations for learners and give specific advice for improvements.
- However, in some lessons the level of technical language used is pitched too high and the learners do not always understand the terms. Some teachers talk for too long and use a limited range of teaching strategies. Planning to meet the needs of individual learners is not always evident and differentiated activities not used effectively.
- Support for learners with identified needs is good. Additional learning support needs are identified quickly and appropriate support put in place. Teachers monitor learners' progress confidently and offer a caring and supportive environment in which to learn.

- Newly appointed managers have taken effective actions which are beginning to drive up standards. Teachers and tutors are implementing methods to tackle retention and these are beginning to improve outcomes for learners. Staff communicate well and there are clear lines of responsibility. Staff feel well supported and are keen to implement strategies focusing on improvements to teaching and learning.
- The observation of teaching and learning is much improved, and the identification of strengths and areas for improvement more rigorous. Sharing of good practice has improved. Teachers are well qualified, get appropriate professional development opportunities and confidently promote equality and diversity in their teaching.
- Specialist accommodation is good. Teachers use information technology well to enhance learning. The resources in photography are of very high quality.
- The course team has accurately assessed the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. They have put in place robust action plans to address identified weaknesses and raise standards. Implementation of the action plans is beginning to have a positive impact.

What does TVU need to do to improve further?

- Identify best practice in raising retention and implement this across the visual arts provision.
- In order to raise achievements, make sure that all lessons are planned with relevant differentiated activities that interest and challenge learners.
- Ensure teaching and terminology are pitched at the appropriate levels so that learners understand and make progress in their studies.
- Consolidate the recent improvements in order to ensure that progress is maintained.

English and modern foreign languages

Grade 3

Context

31. Currently 267 learners are following programmes in GCSE and GCE A-level English, the vast majority of whom are aged 16 to 18 years and are studying full-time. Modern foreign language provision is delivered on a part-time basis, mainly to adults, and includes courses in French, German, Spanish, Russian and Japanese. Around 450 learners enrolled and completed language courses in autumn term 2009. There are, currently, 320 learners enrolled on language courses.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners on full-time courses in English are satisfactory overall, but below the national average in A-level English language and GCSE English. The proportion achieving high grades is lower than national averages. Outcomes are good in modern foreign languages. Success rates on the majority of part-time modern foreign language courses are well above the national average.
- Retention rates on AS English language, AS English language and literature and GCSE English were low in 2008/09. Managers recognised this and made changes to programmes and staffing in order to meet the needs of learners more effectively. Current retention is good.
- The standard of learners' work is satisfactory in English and good in modern foreign languages. Learners' written work shows satisfactory knowledge and understanding of key concepts in English. Their ability to analyse and evaluate, however, is not sufficiently developed. In modern foreign languages, the main emphasis is on speaking and listening and learners achieve good standards.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory in English and good in modern foreign languages. Most language teachers use the target language and learners acquire good fluency and accuracy. In some lessons, learners are not sufficiently involved. Teachers do not sufficiently check their learning and they lose interest. Assessment of written assignments is satisfactory and learners receive feedback which explains what they must do to improve.
- Support for learners is good. Workshops offer learners effective one-to-one support to plan and prepare coursework in English. Learners speak highly of the academic and pastoral support they receive from their teachers, who give freely of their time to help them achieve their academic targets and personal goals. Monitoring of progress and performance is robust and is helping learners to raise the standard of their work.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving in English, and are good in modern foreign languages. The process of self-assessment is well understood by staff and strengths and areas for improvement are accurately

identified. Strategies to bring about improvements in achievement and retention in English are beginning to have effect. Teachers have appropriate opportunities for professional development to improve teaching and learning.

- Learners and teachers have good understanding of equality and diversity. Teachers promote equality and diversity well in a variety of ways, for example through the choice of texts in English, which give learners understanding of different perspectives, beliefs and lifestyles, and through the celebration of the wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds represented through modern and community languages

What does TVU need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of high grades in English at advanced level, through more challenging activities to enable learners to achieve their potential.
- Improve success rates in GCSE English through the sharing of good practice so that all learners benefit from the best practice.
- Use assessment more effectively so that learners know what they need to improve and to enable them to make better progress.
- Use more probing and challenging questions and written tasks, in lessons, so that learners develop more critical, analytical and evaluative skills.

Literacy and numeracy

Grade 2

Context

32. A range of discrete literacy and numeracy courses are offered in Reading and in 15 local workplaces. There are 973 learners on courses that range from entry level through to intermediate level. Key and functional skills programmes are offered across all sites and are also taught in collaboration with schools. Currently there are 1,912 learners enrolled on key skills and 1,020 on functional skills.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good; success rates have improved steadily over the last three years. Learners make good progress towards achieving their learning aims. Pass rates on all accredited courses except numeracy at intermediate level are high. Retention is high on all courses.
- Young learners make good progress in overcoming significant barriers to learning. Learners who had been excluded from school remarked that staff had created a learning environment in which they have changed their behaviour and now enjoy their learning.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lesson planning is detailed and learning outcomes take careful account of individual learners' personal targets, which are discussed at the start of each lesson. Teachers use a good variety of active learning strategies to engage learners' interest. Teachers are effective in planning, directing and managing learning support assistants.
- Initial assessment is good, with an appropriate range of strategies used to accurately record learners' starting points. Information from assessment is used effectively to inform teaching and to set realistic but challenging targets. Learners feel safe on both sites, although some learners report feeling less secure when using the car park for classes held in the evening.
- The behaviour of a minority of learners is sometimes unacceptable. On one occasion observed by inspectors a lack of respect was shown to staff and abusive and sexist language between learners was unchecked.
- Courses are effective in matching the personal aspirations and work-related goals of learners. Staff have effectively developed programmes to meet the needs of learners aged 16 to 18 with poor prior educational experiences and achievements. Learning pathways for all learners are well developed and clearly signposted.
- The college has developed strong and effective partnerships with local statutory and voluntary sector organisations. Literacy and numeracy courses specifically tailored for the needs of army units have raised both skills and morale. The partnership with the local authority has helped reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training over the last three years.

- Support for learners is good. Teachers direct the work of learning support assistants, communication support workers and trained volunteers effectively. Tutors usually plan group tutorials well to ensure that learners understand how to keep themselves and others safe.
- Leadership and management are good in this large curriculum area. There is a strong sense of strategic direction which informs the development of new services. Communication between staff at all levels is good. The self-assessment report is accurate and clearly identifies key strengths and areas for improvement. Quality assurance procedures are rigorous.
- Staff development is good. Staff training has a high priority and all staff have taken part in safeguarding and equality and diversity training. Teachers are involved in sharing good practice by contributing to the training at staff meetings. The work of advanced practitioners is successful in mentoring newly appointed staff and raising the standard of teaching and learning.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Teachers normally address matters relating to equality of opportunity as they arise in the curriculum, but do not actively plan these into lessons. Managers use data effectively to monitor the relative performance of different groups of learners and to close any performance gap.

What does TVU need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that success rates for Level 2 numeracy improve to above the national average through more targeted support for learners.
- Review the content of schemes of work to ensure that matters relating to equality and diversity are adequately covered during lessons.

Business, administration and law

Grade 3

Context

33. Some 380 learners currently follow full-time courses in business, finance, accounting and law. Approximately 150 take vocational courses and 230 are following GCE A-level or GCSE programmes within the sixth form academy. Of the 150 vocational learners, fewer than 130 are full time and take a range of BTEC national and BTEC first programmes along with secretarial courses and accountancy. At the academy, almost all learners are full time, studying GCE A-level business, accounting and law or GCSE business studies.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates are satisfactory and improved in 2008/09. Success rates were, however, low on GCE A-level law and the advanced NVQ in accounting.
- The standard of learners' work in class and assignments is satisfactory. The progress of learners is broadly in line with that predicted from their prior attainment. Most learners contribute with confidence to classroom discussions. Learners on vocational courses develop good work-related skills, and learners on full-time courses improve their employability skills well.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers are confident, enthusiastic and knowledgeable. The majority provide a stimulating range of teaching and learning activities that meet the needs of most learners. In the best lessons effective use is made of ILT and there are good levels of active learning. However some teaching is rather uninspiring and, in a minority of lessons, learners spend considerable time copying notes.
- Managers have developed initiatives to help teachers improve teaching and learning. Grades recorded from lesson observations are now more accurate and over-grading is much less prevalent. However, some teachers still lack confidence in using activities appropriate to the level of the course and subject area.
- Although the number of courses has been rationalised in the last year, learners can still access a satisfactory range to meet their academic or vocational aspirations. There is a suitable range of courses available to allow coherent progression from one level to another.
- Academic support is satisfactory; however, the quality and consistency of target setting and reviews is inconsistent. Welfare and personal support is good. Many learners are provided with comprehensive advice on the options open for progression to higher-level qualifications or employment.
- Teachers and tutors frequently provide targets on ILPs and during reviews which lack precision or are not sufficiently time-bound. In some instances, they do not correct simple errors and omissions in the recording of individual targets.

In addition, there is an over-reliance on oral feedback to learners, often without appropriate written recording. This makes subsequent monitoring of progress more difficult.

- The use of electronic recording and tracking of learners' progress is under-developed. Most learners are, however, aware of their target grades and how to improve upon them. Teachers now record attendance and punctuality electronically, but are not yet using this method consistently to improve performance.
- Satisfactory, but recently improved leadership and direction ensure that all staff are aware of individual roles and responsibilities, and of the intended development and direction of the course area. Managers communicate clearly the actions required to bring about improvements. They have successfully secured the support of all staff to move the curriculum area forward since the last inspection.
- Course teams now use key performance indicators widely to set targets for improvement; individuals respond well to these structured targets. Curriculum leaders plan and organise good staff development to improve teaching and learning and curriculum development. Data are used well to analyse and improve the performance of individual courses.
- The self-assessment and quality improvement processes are satisfactory. The self-assessment reports for vocational and academic courses are broadly accurate. Quality improvement plans clearly identify actions for improvement and these are shared with and supported by all staff. However, it is too early to judge the full impact of some of the actions.

What does TVU need to do to improve further?

- Raise the standard of teaching and learning by challenging learners and meeting the full range of needs and abilities.
- Improve the tracking and monitoring of learners' progress by increasing teachers' confidence in setting precise and quantitative targets with learners.
- Develop and extend the newly introduced electronic tracking system to all courses. Implement fully all elements of the system to assist managers to monitor and improve individual learner and course performance.

Information about the inspection

34. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and seven additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's director of curriculum and quality, as nominee, carried out the reinspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), 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 inspection.
35. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)			
Provider Name:	Thames Valley University	Inspection No	343641
Learning types: 14–16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16–18 Learner responsive: FE full-time and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including E2E); 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships			

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14–16	16–18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection	3002		2129	873	
Full-time learners					
Part-time learners	3431	551	370	1829	681
Overall effectiveness	3	2	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	2				
A. Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	3	3
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	3				
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3				
A3. How safe do learners feel?	2				
A4. Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	3				
A5. How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	3				
B. Quality of provision	3	3	3	3	3
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
B3. How well do partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2				
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3				
C. Leadership and management	3	2	3	3	3
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
C2. How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	3				
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3				
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3				
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
C7. How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3				

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