

# WAC Performing Arts and Media College

Inspection of colleges participating in the Dance and Drama Award scheme

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**Unique reference number:** 59064

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**Last day of inspection:** 10 November 2011

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## Information about the college

1. WAC Performing Arts and Media College is a department of Interchange Trust, which is a charity and company limited by guarantee. The Trust provides arts and media education for students age five to 35. The college runs a three-year diploma course in musical theatre, awarded by Trinity College, London. The college is applying for accreditation by the Council for Dance Education and Training and is currently under temporary validation by Trinity College, London. This is the first dance and drama inspection of this college.
2. The college is based in Hampstead Town Hall and attracts students nationally and internationally. There are currently 33 students enrolled on the diploma course of whom 15 (45%) are in receipt of dance and drama awards (DaDA) funded by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA).

## Summary report

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>
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<b>Grade 3</b>
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<b>Capacity to improve</b>
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<b>Grade 3</b>
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## Overall effectiveness

3. WAC Performing Arts and Media College is a satisfactory college with satisfactory capacity for further improvement. The Director and senior leaders have a clear rationale for including the diploma in musical theatre amongst the suite of courses offered at WAC for young people under the age of 25. A key strength of the diploma course is the economic, social and ethnic diversity of the student population and the study of non-Western performing arts genres. The care and welfare of students is good. Students receive a lot of help in dealing with financial, accommodation and personal issues that may affect their training. Students feel well cared for and the very small school means that staff know individual students well. Staff appreciate good communication from the leadership team and they receive updates about the course through staff meetings and an annual staff development day.
4. Despite these good features outcomes for students are satisfactory. The limited impact of the work of all leaders to establish and rigorously use a cycle of quality assurance of teaching and provision, has not secured rapid enough improvement to raise standards across the 'triple threat' training in dance, acting and singing to consistently good or better. The large majority of students gain related employment in the industry within six months of graduating. Most students complete the course and

retention averages 93% over the last three years. The very few students who leave the course largely do so for personal reasons, but leaders do their utmost to retain students through additional financial support and coaching to help students to try and find ways to sustain their training. The pass rate for practical components of the diploma is 100% and most students reach a satisfactory standard of work in musical theatre, with a very small minority of students achieving a good standard of performance work, often in their acting skills. By contrast submission of written work deemed appropriate for a pass level falls below 100% as a consequence of poor tutoring. The tutoring of written work is under review by senior leaders. Improved planning for all modules that require portfolio evidence is just starting to help students understand what is expected for written work. Teachers do not always help students to develop a technical language that underpins their training. There is some way to go to ensure that standards of research, literacy and depth of understanding successfully meet requirements of the diploma award.

5. The curriculum is satisfactory and improving. Leaders have revised the teaching of voice work and have sustained the inclusion and emphasis upon non-Western performing arts, and increased the breadth and quantity of dance training. Students say there are some clear links across the 'triple threat' training model but a few students would like more reference to leading practitioners, both current and historic, in understanding the history of musical theatre. Teachers possess and often use well their own performing and directing experiences to nurture students in lessons, referencing audition techniques, current trends in casting and teaching repertoire from leading shows.
6. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leaders are working collaboratively to review schemes of work and how to improve the course. However, the college's self-assessment document does not give a robust nor focused evaluation of the quality of outcomes for students and makes very little reference to the criteria used in the inspection of colleges in receipt of dance and drama awards. There is no analysis of the quality of teaching over time nor its impact upon learning. There is little staff involvement in formally evaluating the course through analysis of qualitative evidence and data about retention, progress, and graduate destinations over time.

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

What students like:

- well-established knowledge and experience of teachers who share their performing experiences and awareness of current industry practice
- good welfare and care of students that is personalised to their professional, personal and, increasingly, their academic needs
- good equality, inclusivity and social, ethnic and cultural diversity of the student population which generates a friendly and supportive college community

- improved provision for information communication and technology (ICT) and good facilities both for performing arts and digital media work
- the study of non-Western performing arts genres which broadens students' experience of musical theatre
- feedback from tutors in lessons and after assessments that establishes clear targets for improvement.

**What students would like to see improved:**

- more opportunity to receive regular one-to-one vocal tuition
- greater coherence in lessons that are part of the music and vocal tuition work
- more embedding of contextual study to give greater depth of understanding about the history of musical theatre and key practitioners.

**Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors**

**What employers like:**

- students' work ethic and their ability to work well in master classes, responding positively to a variety of teaching methods
- good concentration and attention to detail.

**What employers would like to see improved:**

- there were no recommendations from employers.

## **Main inspection report**

### **Capacity to make and sustain improvement**

### **Grade 3**

7. The Director and senior leaders demonstrate satisfactory capacity to further improve the course and outcomes for students. The three module leaders are working together to sharpen how the 'triple threat' strands integrate and a member of the core teaching team delivers theory classes to ensure better integration of theory with practical learning. Leaders have addressed the need to review the content of the dance curriculum and students now receive a more intensive dance training which is helping them develop greater technical capacity in ballet, jazz, African and contemporary dance.
8. Leaders respond to feedback from students and course tutors, but a detailed critique of what the feedback shows about year-on-year strengths and areas needing improvement is limited. Leaders recognise that a lack of systematic, objective quality assurance processes is limiting the impact of the improvement priorities that they have identified. Grades for self-assessment are generous and are not tightly linked to an evaluation of evidence about students' progress or the quality of teaching. Leaders have yet to establish a systematic process for judging the quality of teaching that helps all teachers to have a clear

quality benchmark to work towards and for setting goals as part of staff appraisal and professional development as teachers.

9. Leaders provide staff with guidance about the assessment of students when conducting summative assessments and there are good moderation processes in place through double marking. However, leaders have made little explicit reference to how to assess rates of progress based on students' potential judged at audition and their progress journey over a series of lessons or termly. The overall picture of the percentage of students making expected or better than expected progress is not evaluated systematically and does not give leaders or teaching staff a precise enough picture of how well cohorts perform against what they might be expected to achieve.

## **Outcomes for learners**

## **Grade 3**

10. Over the last three years most students have completed the course and achieved satisfactory standards in meeting the requirements for the diploma qualification. Reports by Trinity College, London indicate that the standard of work has been variable over the last few years and achievement in vocal work has been a key area for improvement. A few students achieve a good standard of work by their graduating year and perform showcase work with good skills, often in acting. Whilst third-year performance standards have been rather variable, assessors comment that first year work is showing increasing skill in, for example, ensemble and solo vocal work with competent and inspired harmonies and unaccompanied singing. Some students are also noted for their occasionally good comedic skill. In a classical folkloric project students performed a Kathak dance and Hindustani song to a good standard. Even so, the variability across the cohorts in their stamina, breath control, projection and solidity of dance technique, means that overall competency as 'triple threat' performers is satisfactory.
11. The large majority of students secure work within six months of completing their training. Destinations data shows that students gain employment across the industry including cruise ships, television work, backing vocal and dance work, regional work; a very small minority gain work in well-established shows such as Stomp and television work such as Holby City. While leaders recognise the diversity of destinations as a strength, there are also a few students who undertake work that is not necessarily an employment route from musical theatre training, such as modelling or part-time teaching, although this is often to supplement income between performing contracts. Leaders gather destinations data but critical engagement with these data to assess graduates' progress in the industry over time is lacking and does not underpin course improvement planning.
12. Students feel safe and they receive good guidance about injury prevention and treatment as part of regular Pilates classes. These

classes support the individual needs of students very well with much use of personalised feedback. In vocal and dance classes students are aware of the need to carefully warm up and cool down to prevent injury and optimise their performance. Students have a good understanding of diet and nutrition. While this is integrated into many practical sessions, the level of detail in some students' written work is not always comprehensive.

13. Students enjoy the course and feel that staff set high expectations for professional conduct and encourage students to be highly ambitious for their future. Staff set high expectations for punctuality and attendance which are upheld by most students. Supportive team skills are used well in community performance projects when students work as volunteers or take opportunity to choreograph their own shows as part of fundraising events for the college.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 3**

14. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Most students make satisfactory progress and a minority make good progress. There is some good and outstanding teaching but there are too many missed opportunities to fully accelerate students' progress. The lack of consistency and rigour in lesson planning does not sufficiently drive students' progress over time to be good or better, based on potential judged at audition. There is not enough rigour in holding staff to account for high quality lesson planning. Opportunities are missed to stretch students' abilities in the moment of performance in lessons because some teachers do not have the necessary teaching tools to quickly divert the lesson and set extension tasks for more-able students. Some teaching is overly didactic and does not exploit different ways to divide students for group or solo work that means they work at varying pace or on different levels of work. In some classes that include first, second and third-year students this is imperative and limited lesson planning hinders students' progress. Not all students are equally challenged to extend their ability through spontaneous risk taking, going beyond their comfort zone as a performer.
15. Despite the lack of planning in some teaching, inspectors observed some good teaching and moments of outstanding practice characterised by good pace, questioning techniques to help students evaluate their work, and dynamic studio environments where the energy of teachers enthuses students to raise their efforts. Students occasionally have the chance to peer appraise and give constructive feedback. They comment that peer assessment is used more often in singing than in other classes and students feel they really benefit from helping each other to make improvements and develop more confidence as performers.
16. The quality of advice about academic work has previously been poor, with very little guidance to students about how to develop appropriate

research skills or keep purposeful reflective journals. This is starting to improve as a result of a more focused scheme of work for understanding safe practice, contextual study and developing professional preparation skills for entering the industry. Some student journals shows little depth in researching key characters for plays and limited annotations of scores and scripts. There is some evidence that tutors are starting to give step-by-step constructive feedback to guide students to critique their work. However, improving the quality of third-year written work remains an urgent priority.

17. The assessment system uses several discipline-specific termly and end of year assessments, and while students understand how teachers use a three-tier scaling model, the description of what constitutes the assessment criteria is vague and does not refer to percentiles or achievement levels. As a result students are not certain of how well they are doing in relation to the standards expected nationally for the diploma. They understand how they are meeting individual targets but lack clarity in knowing how to aim for higher standards of work that might be deemed outstanding or exemplary. This is also due to a lack of criteria that defines different levels of achievement. Tracking of students' progress is satisfactory. Leaders are beginning to bring teachers together to learn how to use outcomes from assessments and individual targets to better prepare lessons.
18. Curriculum provision is satisfactory. Leaders have responded to feedback from Trinity College to improve voice work and raise the intensity of dance training. Students undertake more classes in dance and voice classes have been increased. The longer term impact of these changes in driving up performance standards is coming to fruition in class work but has yet to have a marked impact on final year achievement to ensure all graduates are as versatile as possible to compete in the musical theatre industry. Students wish for a third level of streaming for higher achievers in dance. Leaders have introduced more work on monologues and singing solo across all year groups to get students used to performing on their own. Leaders have improved professional preparation classes and devote more attention to helping students learn about types of employment contracts, developing appropriate self-marketing materials and ideas for keeping rehearsal logs about final-year showcase preparations.
19. The college is increasing its links with professional casting directors and agents, notably through more use of guest teachers for master classes. Third-year students say feedback about their work in master classes is extremely helpful. Leaders have relocated these classes and guest audition panels in the autumn term for third-year students to quickly raise the bar for industry expectations. Leaders capture feedback from master class teachers to evaluate the quality of students and assess their work ethic. WAC ensures agents are invited to showcase performances and this is beginning to give students a higher profile in the sector.

20. Students receive good pastoral care from a range of professionals and work with an external physiotherapist is good. Staff work well as a team. Specialist staff roles, such as the disability officer and social inclusion officer, complement the work of the teachers in offering good wraparound care for students. Leaders support tutors' professional development through courses such as first aid and training to deal with epilepsy, all of which support effective work with individual students. Students with specific learning needs receive increasingly good support for the written components of the diploma. Leaders have wisely extended the induction period to two weeks, which students say is beneficial.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 3**

21. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior leaders are securing steady improvements in outcomes for students and in the quality of provision, but the setting of high expectations and targets to raise standards is not ambitious enough to secure rapid improvement. Teaching teams understand how their sessions fit into the overall course planning. However, there is no annual action plan for each discipline driven by analysing the impact of the curriculum on outcomes for students. Weaknesses in lesson planning and in the use of assessment data to monitor and accelerate students' progress are holding back the impact of the curriculum and some good teaching in securing equally high achievement in dancing, singing and acting.
22. Self-assessment is satisfactory. Leaders are beginning to pinpoint key strengths and areas requiring improvement, but this is not sufficiently underpinned by analysis of how students progress from enrolment to graduation and expected outcomes against potential seen at audition, nor the impact of teaching on outcomes for students. Discipline-based subject evaluations are lacking and do not feed into an overall development plan. There is an urgent need to make outcomes for students the priority focus in all evaluation and action planning. Staff receive updates about student destinations and informally discuss how these reflect the relevance of the course in meeting the needs of the industry.
23. Leaders act upon student feedback from year group tutorials and students' course evaluations both mid and end of term. The very small student population means they feel their views are well heard because staff know them extremely well both as a group and as individuals. However, there is no student representative who attends senior leadership or board meetings to represent the student voice or hear first hand how strategic decision making affects the course.
24. Links with casting directors and agents are becoming increasingly established and support delivery of master classes and professional preparation classes. However, the views of agencies and employers are



not yet formally or systematically captured to evaluate the entire course or support strategic decision making. The director has set in motion plans to develop a new advisory panel this year.

25. Leaders undertake lesson observations and give feedback to staff but the form used to observe lessons uses closed yes or no questions, with no analysis of students' progress and learning in lessons. This means teachers do not consistently receive guidance about how to improve the progress of all students in lessons. Leaders have yet to establish a systematic process for judging the quality of teaching that helps teachers have a clear quality benchmark to work towards and for setting goals as part of staff appraisal and professional development as teachers. Despite this there is evidence that some teaching is good, but this is not a result of regular debate or training with staff about what constitutes good or outstanding teaching. Leaders have not completed an analysis of the quality of teaching over time to support the grade proposed in the self-assessment document.
26. A very small minority of teachers have a formally recognised teaching qualification. Teaching staff are experts in their field of performance work but the lack of formal training in teaching is not enabling them to excel as teachers. Many possess a good awareness of key principles which inform good teaching and their knowledge is ripe for further development through recognised teacher training courses.
27. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The high percentage of students from minority ethnic groups and from diverse socio-economic backgrounds characterises the mission of WAC in widening participation and giving equal opportunity to students who may need high levels of financial support. Leaders rightly see this as a key strength in recruitment to the course, but the monitoring of student achievement by minority ethnic groups and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is underdeveloped and does not sufficiently inform course evaluation. Students comment there is good transparency in being selected or invited to take part in performance projects and in performing certain roles for end of year showcase. The inclusion of non-Western performing arts is enjoyed by students and supports their good understanding of cultural diversity. The inclusive and welcoming community is a reason why students choose to study at WAC.
28. The promotion of safeguarding is good. The college upholds statutory requirements for the safe vetting and recruitment of staff. Tutors receive updates about legislation and receive training in protecting young people in studio practice, making sure physical correction meets all guidelines for this sector.
29. The college provides good value for money. Leaders make judicious decisions in giving scholarships to students most in need of financial support, and as a result most students who receive DaDA awards and the college's WAC scholarships do complete the course. Leaders have

recently invested in new ICT equipment to better support students' research skills and help those with specific learning difficulties.

## **What does WAC need to do to improve further?**

- Systematically capture and respond to suggestions from industry professionals to continually inform evaluation and development of the course.
- Develop greater leadership capacity by ensuring that quality assurance and evaluation become systematically embedded to help all leaders analyse how to improve provision to ensure outcomes for all students are good or better.
- Significantly improve the monitoring of the quality of teaching so that all teachers have a detailed understanding of how to raise standards through consistently good teaching in all areas of the musical theatre course.
- Raise the percentage of good and outstanding teaching, ensuring that all teachers plan lessons that consistently stretch the most-able and support the less-able to make at least good progress in singing, dancing and acting.
- Encourage more teachers to gain a formally recognised teaching qualification.
- Improve the collation and evaluation of graduate destination data over time as part of course evaluation and development.
- Develop the quality in students' written work so that all evidence is presented well, engages students in thorough critical reflection and shows a good contextual understanding of musical theatre.

## **Information about the inspection**

30. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and an additional inspector, assisted by the Director and Head of Acting as nominees, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also considered the college's most recent self-assessment report, comments from the qualification awarding body, Trinity College, London, and data about recruitment, retention and destination. Inspectors observed lessons, including some joint observations, and the lead inspector met with groups of students from each of the three year groups to gather their views. Inspectors considered the views of teaching staff, module leaders and employers. The lead inspector analysed samples of student written work and reviewed student profiles and assessment data.

Record of main findings			
<b>Provider name</b>	<b>WAC Performing Arts and Media College</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>	376310
<b>Learning types: 16-18 learner responsive:</b> FE full-time.			

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection</b> Full-time learners.	33
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	3
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>3</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3
How well do learners progress?	3
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3
How safe do learners feel?	2
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	NA
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>3</b>
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3
<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?	3
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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