

Cambridge Performing Arts

Inspection of colleges participating in the in the Dance and Drama Award scheme

Unique reference number: 50009

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Information about the college

1. Cambridge Performing Arts (CPA) is registered charity and a family business directed by the principal, training young people in dance and the performing arts. Students in receipt of dance and drama (DaDa) awards take the three year Trinity College diploma in professional musical theatre or dance. In addition, the school runs a one year full-time foundation course, which prepares students for a Trinity qualification in musical theatre, and a theatre school providing pre-vocational training. CPA also offers a range of community classes in the evenings and at weekends, and provides classes and workshops in numerous schools and community colleges in the region.
2. CPA has a history of encouraging newcomers to dance, particularly young men who have not had previous experience in the performing arts but demonstrate potential to train. The college is currently in receipt of 54 DaDa awards; all applicants who are offered places on the full-time diploma training courses are offered a second audition for a DaDA award. The full student body during 2011/12 comprises 127 diploma students and 21 foundation course students.
3. The principal, a bursar, student welfare officer, injury clinic manager, and the two course leaders manage the school. There is a head of course for each diploma course, who monitors provision and manages subject leaders who are, in turn, responsible for briefing and communicating with staff in their departments.
4. The previous inspection of the CPA took place in November 2008, when overall effectiveness was outstanding.

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision

Grade 2

Capacity to improve

Grade 2

Overall effectiveness

5. The overall effectiveness of provision at CPA is good. Outcomes for students are outstanding. Pass rates on the diploma courses are excellent having been at 100% over several years. The school keeps good records of the reasons for the small number of early leavers; in most cases students who leave early do so for reasons unconnected with their course. A good proportion of students achieve sustained employment upon graduation, the majority in cruise ships or with

touring dance or musical productions. The quality of students' work is generally good, and sometimes outstanding, in both musical theatre and dance. Teaching and learning are good overall, with many outstanding features. The curriculum is well balanced, and provides students with good technical focus and accomplishment, as well as a broader understanding of the profession in which they intend to work. Teachers have a very good range of professional experience and skills, and bring a valuable range of professional contacts to the school. Arrangements for reviewing curriculum effectiveness and design are good. Students work hard, develop a strong professional ethic and take an active part in the life of the school. However, students lack effective mechanisms and encouragement to engage in concerted and clearly recorded reflection on their own practice.

6. Leadership and management are good overall. Leadership is excellent, with a strong commitment to students and the profession shared amongst leaders, managers and teachers. Measures to gather and respond to student feedback are excellent. The views of employers are sought, but the school has only limited success in gathering a sufficiently wide range of responses from those who take on graduates. Arrangements to promote equality and diversity are good, as are measures to safeguard all students. However, the school lacks a coherent long-term plan to attract under-represented groups into training. Self-assessment and quality assurance arrangements have improved during the past twelve months and are currently good. All staff have been observed teaching during 2011/12, and managers plan to link outcomes from observations more productively with staff appraisals. The school uses its resources flexibly, though managers recognise the limitations of current multi-site premises and are engaged in planning to secure single-site accommodation.

What does name of college need to do to improve further?

- Develop students' reflective skills and provide mechanisms for students to record and review their progress and practice
- Further develop quality assurance measures, including teaching and learning observations, so as to identify and share the good practice existing in outstanding classes
- Establish more effective arrangements to gather and act upon feedback from employers of graduates
- Consider ways to attract greater numbers of under-represented groups into training
- Implement plans for college re-location to a single-site

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the close support and individual guidance received from first contact with CPA
- the extensive and up-to-date professional experience of their teachers and the specialist skills and insights brought by frequent visiting practitioners
- the business skills course that gives very useful preparation for the world of work
- the performance projects which provide challenge and enable skills to be practised in a realistic professional environment
- the generic first year programme which provides an opportunity to discover skills and talents previously overlooked
- the open and approachable leadership team who encourage comment and feedback.

What learners would like to see improved:

- a reduction in the number of sites on which the school operates
- more consistent application of discipline and attendance rules
- more opportunities to showcase work in large local or London venues
- more individual feedback from visiting practitioners.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the strong professional values shown by CPA students and graduates and their ability to work constructively as part of a team
- the responsiveness of leaders and managers at CPA

What employers would like to see improved:

- no comments were received

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. The school has good capacity to make and sustain improvements. Since the previous inspection the school has made good progress in dealing with required and recommended actions for improvement. Data relating to students' achievement and retention are more thoroughly and productively analysed, and outcomes from course reviews now feature more explicitly in the school self-assessment report. Good progress has been made in improving student representation arrangements, and library and research resources for students have improved. Students' outcomes remain outstanding, with numerous examples of excellent performance skills noted by Trinity examiners during the

past three years. The generic first-year programme provides good opportunities for students to experiment and develop skills they were unsure they possessed.

8. Staff bring considerable professional experience and expertise to their classes, and they are passionate about their subjects. Leaders give excellent encouragement and direction to staff, and give clear direction to the school. The openness of leaders is highly valued by staff and students. Quality assurance and improvement measures are good overall. Arrangements to observe and improve the quality of teaching and learning have been improved during the current year and are now good, though there is insufficient identification and dissemination of good practice amongst staff. Leaders are putting plans in place to deal with the school's need for single site accommodation.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

9. Achievement levels are exceptionally high. Since the previous inspection all students who have completed their training pass the diploma. The school carefully investigates the reasons for any early leaving. Almost all early leavers over the past three years did so for reasons that were not connected to dissatisfaction with course or school life. Attendance and punctuality at classes are both excellent. Students enjoy their work and are conscientious and engaged. First- and second-year students respect the work of third years, and aspire to achieve in the ways they see when viewing final year rehearsals and show pieces. Graduate destinations are very good and are tracked successfully; between 2009 and 2011, around 82% of CPA graduates had a known destination within the industry.
10. Trinity College assessment, moderation and annual reports are very positive. The most recent final year Trinity assessment speaks of 'students [who] were mostly well rehearsed and had good levels of performance energy'. Of final performance numbers, the assessors noted 'good complexity of content and timing', 'very well executed' numbers demonstrating 'strong contemporary line and technique'. One outstanding performance evidenced 'coherent and technically demanding work... resulting in a piece with strong performance impact', whilst another student was seen to perform 'with outstanding focus and energy showing very strong alignment and placing'. Of written work, assessors have also noted clarity and detail in essays, together with evidence of strong argument and depth of research.
11. The school devotes much energy to providing a caring and safe environment for students, who feel very secure and speak warmly of the family atmosphere at CPA. The school is well known and well regarded in the locality, and leaders rightly place great responsibility on students to act as positive ambassadors and advocates of CPA; nearly all rise successfully to this challenge.

The quality of provision

Grade 1

12. Teaching and learning are good overall, with many outstanding features. The vast majority of classes observed were good or outstanding, and none was inadequate. In the best classes teachers had clear expectations for disciplined training and rehearsal, with clear and well-articulated professional context. Students across all sites and subject areas inspected were engaged with their learning. The standards of technique evidenced in some classes, particularly second-year ballet and first-year jazz, was very high. In singing classes the precision of feedback and correction was impressive, placing training in a clear professional context. In a voice class, excellent one-to-one guidance was given when students were working on vocal exercises, with very good use of questioning to elicit understandings of vowel sounds. Accompanists were fully involved with teachers in developing students' learning in the best classes. For example, in a ballet class accompaniment was used effectively to demonstrate presence or absence of dynamics.
13. In less successful classes, students were not sufficiently challenged, and some individuals' needs were not met. Generally, less successful sessions were planned in ways that focussed on teacher activity rather than on students' learning. Weaker plans lacked detail and made little connection between activities and intended outcomes for students. Some staff have yet to understand the value of detailed planning for learning, and regard lesson planning as a mechanical activity. In less successful sessions praise, correction and feedback were imprecise, leaving students unsure about ways to improve their practice. Though students are highly motivated and engaged, they have no clearly established means to record corrections or reflect over time on their developing practice.
14. All students benefit from frequent contact with highly regarded industry practitioners, some of whom give students exposure to highly specialised and challenging techniques that prepares them well for auditions and future work. Students have also benefitted from the introduction of performance projects that give them very good opportunities to develop and refine triple threat skills and confidence. An increase in the number of external performances, and especially performances in larger venues, has also had a beneficial impact on students' technique and confidence since the previous inspection. The curriculum is well balanced and frequently reviewed. In particular, the generic first-year curriculum provides students with very good opportunities to explore areas in which they have little experience. Many individuals have 'uncovered' talents during this period and gone on to pursue successful careers in a discipline other than the one for which they entered training.
15. Care, guidance and support for students are excellent. Guidance on safety and injury prevention is effective and well regarded by students. Very clear channels of communication between support and teaching staff ensure that students' needs are quickly met. In addition to the wide range of in-school health, welfare, career guidance, counselling and general pastoral support, students benefit from CPA's own agency service that frequently places students into short-term contracts whilst they train and at graduation.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

16. Leadership and management are good overall. Leadership provided by the principal and senior management team is excellent. Senior staff firmly establish a vision for the school based on a strong commitment to students and the profession. This vision is energetically shared amongst teachers and other staff. Staff enjoy working for CPA and their enthusiasm is conveyed directly to students. Amongst staff generally and the leaders particularly, there is a wealth of industry knowledge and experience which is applied for students' benefit.
17. A board of trustees provides good oversight and challenge to the principal and senior management team. Trustees offer a good range of relevant skills to the school, including expertise in finance, counselling, education, law and performing arts. Clear records are kept of trustee meetings and of student appeal panels or other formal trustee events. Members of the board visit the school frequently and a member of the board sits as part of the audition panel for DaDa awards. However, trustees do not self-assess their own activity and input, nor do they formally review or sign-off the school self-assessment report. Students do not have formal representation on the board of trustees.
18. Measures to gather and respond to student feedback are excellent, and have improved considerably since the previous inspection. Students representatives, chosen by each year group, enjoy very good formal access to the principal and other senior managers. All students also benefit from excellent informal access to leaders, managers and teachers. Students have confidence that their voice is heard, and wherever possible leaders will take action in response to requests or comment. Good records are now kept of the destinations of graduates. However, the school has only limited success in gathering responses from those who take on graduates, and currently has little insight into how its graduates are viewed by their employers.
19. Arrangements to promote equality and diversity are good. The school has a long-standing commitment to audition those who have little previous formal training in dance or musical theatre. Over recent years several such applicants have been offered places at the school on the basis that they showed early talent or some raw level of ability; many of these students have subsequently developed impressively as dancers and performers. However, though a number of individuals have benefitted from broad audition policies, the school lacks a coherent long-term plan to routinely and consistently attract under-represented groups into training. Promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is generally good, though some teachers overlook opportunities to encourage discussions among students, or to develop notions of diversity in performance.
20. The school has good measures in place to safeguard all students. Premises are secure, and good attention is paid to health and safety in studios and public spaces. A number of changing areas were of poor quality at one site, but the school was to move out of the building very shortly after inspection. While the school occupies multiple sites and timetabling is split across these, students are placed in the difficult position of having to travel quickly between buildings after

lessons, often moving out of warm studios to the street and back into other studio spaces in a short space of time, without having proper time to acclimatise or properly change clothing.

21. Self-assessment and quality assurance arrangements have improved during the past twelve months and are currently good. All staff have been observed teaching during 2011/12, and managers plan to link outcomes from observations more productively with staff appraisals. Whilst managers have a clearer understanding of the quality of teaching, observation reports still focus too much on teaching and teacher activity rather than learning. Recurrent themes for improvement or areas of good practice are identifiable in observation reports, but have yet to be drawn into systematic and time-bound action plans for improvement. For example, observation documents show a need to develop a number of teachers' skills in giving individual correction and feedback during every lesson, but a plan has yet to be put in place to deal with this area of practice across the staff group. The self-assessment report draws on a range of formal and informal feedback from managers, and takes good account of the views of students. Data, including retention, attendance and graduation information are now better used to inform self-assessment, an area for improvement at the previous inspection.
22. The school uses its resources flexibly and with a concern for improving student outcomes and experience wherever possible. Managers recognise the limitations of current multi-site premises, and trustees and senior leaders are engaged in planning to secure single-site accommodation.

Information about the inspection

23. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the college's course leader for dance, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
24. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They also observed lessons.

Record of main findings			
Provider name	Cambridge Performing Arts	Inspection number	387995
Learning types:16-18 learner responsive: FE full-time and part-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	148
Part-time learners	
Overall effectiveness	2
Capacity to improve	2
Outcomes for learners	
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1
How well do learners progress?	1
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2
How safe do learners feel?	2
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	1
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2
Quality of provision	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1
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?	1
<i>How effectively do Trustees provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	2
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1
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

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