

Northern School of Contemporary Dance

Higher education institution

Inspection dates		11–14 November 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Outstanding-1
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for students		Outstanding-1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Outstanding-1
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding-1

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is outstanding because:

- students achieve their qualifications and develop the skills to the very high level that they need to progress successfully to prestigious, high quality dance degrees
- staff actively promote a culture of high expectations and autonomy in students who become strongly independent thoughtful practitioners, developing curiosity, creativity and a broad range of personal and social skills
- students develop very good peer review and critical evaluation skills
- students benefit from outstanding specialist accommodation and learning resources
- staff have a very broad range of experience and professional expertise which they employ tirelessly for students' benefit
- very good pastoral and academic support ensure that students make excellent progress
- managers and staff share a culture of relentless self-improvement that they imbue daily in students. Loyalty to the Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) and its leadership is particularly strong
- a recent restructure has significantly strengthened NSCD's effectiveness, and brought clarity and energy to departmental management
- staff and managers benefit from an excellent range of training and professional development activities
- leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum meets local, national and student needs exceptionally well. Residents of the city benefit highly from the excellent learning and participation activities
- students enhance their employability and their repertoire of performance skills by working on outreach projects with children in local schools and with a good range of community groups
- managers ensure NSCD provides a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment in which all individuals can flourish.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Capture and analyse outcomes from peer observations more effectively, to share elements of good practice better across the staff team.
- Use course reviews and perception surveys more effectively to help raise standards and inform students about actions taken.
- Extend the use of information and learning technologies in lessons.
- Eradicate the low levels of distraction caused by a minority of students at the start of lessons by sharing and building upon existing good practice.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Access to Higher Education dance course at NSCD is one of only a few level 3 courses of its kind in the United Kingdom (UK). Its primary aim is to act as a foundation course for dancers, most of whom aim to progress to dance degrees at university or professional training. The course draws most of its students from across the UK, with a small minority from overseas. The majority of students are aged 16 to 18 when they commence the course. Each year around two thirds of students are female, about a third are from black and minority ethnic heritage and around a third receive additional learning support. ▪ Outcomes for students are outstanding. Over the past three years, the proportion of students completing their course and successfully achieving their qualifications has been very high. Of the very few students who leave the course early, virtually all receive partial accreditation for the work they complete. ▪ Staff strongly and successfully encourage students to take responsibility for their learning, to work constructively together, to experiment freely, and to review and evaluate each other's progress. As a result, students become strongly independent in their approach to work, they develop their curiosity, creativity and a very broad range of personal and social skills. The small minority of students who enrol without a level 2 qualification in English or mathematics receive good support to acquire these qualifications. ▪ Virtually all students progress to high-profile dance degrees at national centres of excellence. A very small minority of students each year progress directly to suitable dance employment. The few students who decide they do not wish to continue with a career in dance or wish to move to another area of performing arts receive high-quality support and guidance to ensure they progress to a course that meets their evolving career aspirations. ▪ All prospective students receive high-quality initial information about the course from promotional literature, NSCD's websites and at open days. Competition for places on the course is intense. All applicants attend an audition, which provides them with comprehensive insight into the content and nature of the course, as well as making clear the level of study and the very high expectations of staff. This ensures students have maximum opportunity to assess the suitability of the course in matching their longer-term aims. The audition process also enables staff to select those students who are best suited to the course and who will gain maximum benefit from it. ▪ Managers have introduced thorough procedures to ensure students can contact one another, establish informal networks and secure suitable accommodation before the start of teaching. Where relevant, for example when applicants are under 18, NSCD staff fully involve parents in each stage of the pre-entry process. As a result students start the course feeling secure, enthusiastic and confident. 	

- Students value highly what they learn from the comprehensive induction programme. This deals with a broad range of topics including discussion of course values and expectations, team building, assessment methods, healthy eating, safety in lessons, injury prevention and equality and diversity. The induction fully engages and motivates students from the outset, it provides a comprehensive introduction and enables them to form strong friendships with fellow students from across all parts of NSCD, including amongst those taking degree-level studies.
- Students make outstanding progress relative to their starting points. Over the past three years, the numbers of students achieving distinction grades for coursework has increased and is very high. Staff set challenging goals for students. They establish very high expectations and develop a strong sense of professionalism, responsibility and independence among students. Students demonstrate a sense of healthy competition in lessons; they work very hard and make very good progress, producing high-quality work and demonstrating very good acquisition of creative skills and dance technique.
- There is no discernible difference between the successful completion rate for different groups of students by gender, age or ethnicity. Staff accurately identify any learners with additional support needs, for example those with dyslexia, or those students who speak English as an additional language. Staff create a strongly individualised programme for each student and provide appropriate support to help these learners make the same progress and achieve in line with other students.
- Throughout the course, staff actively encourage students to consider progression options. Students have frequent opportunities to meet many different leading dance exponents, and discuss with them all aspects of work in the industry. Teachers have a comprehensive insight into the range of progression routes available to students. They work closely with students to help them identify the most appropriate courses to meet their skills and interests. In particular, students attend rigorous mock auditions, run by NSCD staff. These help students prepare very well for auditions, and maximise their chance of successful progression.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding, resulting in virtually all students successfully achieving their qualification, and progressing to dance degrees at prestigious dance courses around the country.
- From the outset, all teachers establish the highest expectations of students, and actively promote in them a culture of independence, self-reliance, autonomy and creativity. For example, in a dance technique lesson where the teacher was unavoidably delayed, students took the initiative, and promptly started the class, all fully engaging with the activities, until a member of staff arrived.
- In all lessons, teachers introduce a diverse range of stimulating activities that fully engage and motivate the students to experiment with ideas and extend their knowledge and experience. For example in a fitness lesson, the teacher clearly explained the relevance of each exercise and its bearing on the development of the students' technical dance abilities.
- Teachers frequently ask students to review each other's work in lessons. Students keenly engage in such activity, providing constructive and insightful feedback to their peers. Students routinely make notes throughout lessons, and use these to build a detailed and constructive progress log. As a result they are able to reflect on, and continually evaluate their work, helping to consolidate learning and understanding.
- Students are punctual and attendance rates are high. Students arrive for technique classes early and take individual responsibility to prepare and warm up prior to the start of the lesson. Students' approach to health and safety is good. For example, without prompting, all students wear appropriate clothing and remove all jewellery for practical sessions. Behaviour in lessons and workshops is very good, and students work very conscientiously. In a very small number of lessons, teachers do not sufficiently deal with occasional low-level chatting among students.

- The quality of specialist accommodation and resources is outstanding. Studios are spacious, with suitable flooring, and all rooms have good music systems that teachers use in most lessons. A well-stocked library acts as an excellent reference and learning resource and contains a broad range of books, videos and periodicals. Students use it frequently to research and engage in independent learning and project work outside lessons.
- Students also have access to a well-equipped lighting studio and video editing suite, where they develop a wider range of technical skills beyond the main dance curriculum. The professional-standard theatre provides an excellent venue for solo and group performances to live audiences. Students respect and value this high-quality environment in which they work and study.
- Teachers and managers have a very good range of experience and professional expertise, which they use to foster a purposeful and professional standard in students during lessons. Managers frequently arrange for high profile professional dancers and choreographers to provide specialist workshops, and to work on the creation of dances with students. As a result the students increase their understanding of how professionals plan, devise and present work. Accompanists support teachers skilfully and imaginatively in all technique classes; their input helps engage students well, and adds significantly to the atmosphere, enjoyment and concentration in class.
- Teachers are highly committed to supporting students, both during and outside lessons. For example, at the close of a contemporary technique lesson, many students remained behind and sought further clarification and guidance from the teacher on their technical development. Students also gain substantial benefit from studying in a higher-education setting, working alongside undergraduates and post-graduates. This helps raise their aspirations, share best practice, and makes them aware of the expectations of higher-level study.
- Students benefit from clear, challenging, and sequential targets set by their teachers. These ensure that students understand what they need to do in lessons, between lessons and over the longer term. Teachers provide frequent detailed oral feedback on progress in lessons. For example, in a technique lesson, the teacher worked sensitively with individual students to make corrections to posture, line and positioning, before questioning the whole group about what they were learning from each activity. Teachers also give detailed and perceptive written feedback to students on assignments. As a result students have a clear understanding of how they can extend their theoretical and practical grasp of dance.
- Good arrangements are in place to improve the English and mathematics skills of the small number of students who have not gained a GCSE grade C or above before the start of the programme. Teachers screen all students as part of their induction to identify those who require additional learning support. For example, students who speak English as an additional language and those with dyslexia receive excellent support that enables them to keep pace with their peers and engage fully with all aspects of the course. Staff routinely encourage students to improve and refine their written English skills by maintaining a reflective journal.
- Pastoral and personal support for students are outstanding. All students receive detailed guidance and support from initial application and audition, through to induction, during their course and finally to progression to higher education. For example, following the initial offer of a place at NSCD, staff invite all students and their parents to 'house-hunting' days, directing them towards accommodation approved by a specialist housing agency for students in Leeds. Students benefit from access to a broad range of professional support that helps ensure their well-being, for example, they have good access to physiotherapy, dietary advice, massage and counselling services.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leadership and management are outstanding. The Principal has brought unity, clarity of purpose and visionary leadership to NSCD since her appointment in 2012. Managers and staff share a culture of relentless self-improvement that they imbue daily in students. Loyalty to NSCD and its leadership is powerful. NSCD's strategic plan and vision translate into clear objectives and action

planning at operational level. Department heads and staff work to well understood and clearly communicated targets centred on improvements for students and the wider community.

- A recent restructure has brought clarity and energy to departmental management. Lines of responsibility and communications between staff and managers are very good. Strong team work across courses and departments brings considerable benefits for students, enabling them to work closely and collaboratively with higher-education students and staff and with members of the local community.
- Governors provide strong support and appropriate challenge to the Principal and managers. Members of the board are knowledgeable about NSCD's work and position as a member of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama. A recent review of governance structures and processes resulted in more effective committee working and scrutiny. Governors bring a strong skills set to bear for the benefit of NSCD, with expertise in education, finance, architecture and legal services. Student governors make a full and valued contribution to the work of the board. Clerking is highly effective.
- Measures to assure and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are new but beginning to have a beneficial impact on students' experiences and outcomes. Staff also undertake peer observations, which are used informally to share good practice. Teachers engage in frequent discussion of practice and share ideas freely. Managers have only recently introduced the capture and analysis of outcomes from peer observations. Strategies to share best practice more widely are at the relatively early stages of development.
- Quality improvement and management planning are well informed by students' and other users' views. However, managers do not yet analyse the welter of material gathered from evaluations and satisfaction surveys effectively in ways that allow for rapid in-year improvements. Student representatives work purposefully through the effective student communications committee to identify strengths of provision and areas for improvement.
- Staff and managers benefit from an excellent range of training and professional development activities. Frequent training and updating ensures that relevant staff have a very good understanding of child protection, safeguarding, mental health support, health and safety, and other areas related to student well-being. Annual appraisals of staff and managers are effective and well regarded. Excellent levels of support allow staff to maintain and enhance their professional practice through external training and visits. Staff and students make very good use of frequent guest workshops from nationally, and internationally, renowned practitioners in dance to refresh and challenge their practice.
- Leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum meets local, national and student needs exceptionally well. Staff used a recent re-validation of the programme very well to reflect on the purpose and effectiveness of provision. Managers engage energetically with the other members of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, and are strong in their determination to maintain a vibrant and important centre of dance excellence outside the capital. Local communities benefit from the wide-ranging activities of the learning and participation programme, which brings local residents and school children into contact with dance and performance, often for the first time. Students enhance their employability and develop teaching and performance skills by working with children in local schools and with a large range of community groups who frequently visit NSCD.
- Managers ensure NSCD provides a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment in which all individuals can flourish. Equality of opportunity permeates all aspects of NSCD's work, and staff and students respect and promote individuality and diversity. Managers design and run auditions to enable them to spot talent in students who may not have had formal dance training. Teachers are strongly mindful of individual needs and abilities during their teaching and assessment activities. Work with local community groups strongly promotes the benefits of dance and movement to individuals who would otherwise lack access to such opportunities. Complaints and disputes amongst students or staff are very rare, but managers deal with any conflicts promptly and sensitively.

- Arrangements to safeguard students are good. Staff are well trained in relevant safeguarding matters and fully understand how to deal with safeguarding disclosures or concerns. The safeguarding officer has good oversight of the welfare and safety of under-18s and looked after students. All employees of NSCD, whether in supervised or unsupervised contact with students, are subject to disclosure and barring checks; visiting tutors and guest practitioners also undergo disclosure and barring checks. Teachers ensure students work safely, and students understand well the connections between professionalism and safe working practice.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

The Northern School of Contemporary Dance

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	1	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for students	1	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	1	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	1	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Performing arts	1

Type of provider	Higher Education Institution								
Age range of students	16+								
Approximate number of all students over the previous full contract year	33								
Principal/CEO	Janet Smith								
Date of previous inspection	NA								
Website address	www.NSCD.ac.uk								
Provider information at the time of the inspection									
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above		
Total number of students (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	27	6	N/A	N/A	
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	N/A		N/A		N/A				
Number of students aged 14-16	N/A								
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	N/A								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A								

Contextual information

NSCD is a specialist dance college located in Chapeltown in Leeds, West Yorkshire. The majority of students at NSCD are studying at undergraduate or post-graduate level. These courses were outside the scope of this inspection. However, the school has one cohort of students that take the access to higher education course, which was subject to the inspection. NSCD is part of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama – an umbrella organisation whose eight member organisations are recognised as providing much of the highest quality performing arts training and education in the country. NSCD recruit students from across the UK and abroad.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Peter Nelson HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the Head of Academic Registry as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors also used data on students' achievements over the past three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and on-line questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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