

Academy of Live and Recorded Arts

Dance and drama school

Inspection dates

21–22 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- All students who complete their training achieve their qualifications and the majority develop good performance skills.
- Trustees and staff have a very strong commitment to equality of opportunity and successfully recruit students from diverse backgrounds.
- Teachers instil in students an enthusiasm for working in the theatre, film and radio; students enjoy their training and quickly work well as a company.
- Teachers provide good feedback to students following performances and set precise targets to help them improve.
- Teachers monitor students' progress very closely and have a very good awareness of each individual's training needs.
- Teachers provide effective guidance to students so that they are aware of the expectations of the course and potential future job opportunities.
- Teachers use their industry expertise well to link the training to the demands of employment.
- Trustees and senior leaders manage the links between the two sites in Wigan and Wandsworth effectively in order to ensure parity in learners' experiences.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because

- Trustees and senior managers do not evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment sufficiently during the academic year in order to bring about further improvements.
- Teachers do not always ensure that the choice of scripts for performance in the second year matches the skills and training needs of all students.
- Students in the second and third year of study lack a sufficiently detailed critical language to evaluate and develop their work fully.
- A small minority of students do not adhere well enough to the professional dress standards required in workshops and rehearsals.
- Staff do not liaise with a wide enough range of employers to meet all students' employment needs.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Academy of Live and Recorded Arts (ALRA) is a private performing arts organisation that trains students for employment in the theatre and related industries. ALRA has two sites, ALRA South in Wandsworth, South London, and ALRA North in Wigan. ALRA specialises in preparing students for employment in live theatre, film, television and radio, and recruits students from across the country.
- At the time of the inspection there were 213 students on acting courses at ALRA, of whom 65 were in receipt of Dance and Drama Award (DaDA) funding. For students in receipt of DaDA funding, ALRA offers a three-year acting diploma at level 6 and a 15 month acting diploma at level 5. Both qualifications are awarded by Trinity College, London.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders and managers should evaluate more thoroughly the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching, learning and assessment throughout the year. They should ensure trustees receive information about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that they can hold managers to account for making further improvements.
- Teachers should ensure that through their choice of texts for assessed performances, and through the directorial approach taken, all students are able to develop their performance skills fully in the second and third year of study.
- Teachers should ensure all students develop the critical language necessary to evaluate their own work and make improvements.
- Staff should be more meticulous in ensuring that students adhere fully to the dress code required during lessons and rehearsals in order to prepare them better for future employment.
- Staff should extend further the range of agents with whom they work, and ensure a higher proportion of students are signed with agents on completion of their course.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is good

- Trustees and senior leaders manage the link between their academies at ALRA North and ALRA South well in order to ensure parity in the quality of students' experiences. For example, teachers share their expertise very well across the two sites through exchange activities, team teaching and peer observations.
- Trustees and staff at all levels in the academy have a very strong commitment to equality of opportunity. It is part of the trustees' mission for the academy to provide access to theatre and related training to students from all backgrounds. Staff achieve this very well by holding auditions and recruiting students from across the country, in particular in areas of high social or economic deprivation.
- Teachers make effective use of peer observations to share good practice.
- Senior managers work well with local stakeholders, in particular at ALRA North where the borough council provides very good support to the academy, for example in providing subsidised accommodation. Staff use their links with employers and community groups well to so that students participate in a range of projects that broaden their experience and readiness for work.
- Managers' evaluation of the quality of provision is accurate and they identify well the academy's key strengths and areas for improvement in their annual self-assessment report. However, in their management meetings at all levels of the organisation they do not focus sufficiently on evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in order to bring about improvements to students' experiences during the academic year. As a consequence, teaching, learning and assessment have not improved markedly since the previous inspection.
- Most teaching resources are good across the two campuses and students at ALRA North benefit from recently refurbished studios and a 200-seat theatre. At ALRA South, students have a limited range of up-to-date resources available to them in the library to use for their independent learning.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Trustees have a wide range of experience in education and theatre and use this well to provide guidance to the senior leadership team. They have carefully overseen the creation of ALRA North over the past five years. Trustees have set a strong mission for the academy to maintain its dual focus on live and recorded performance which staff understand well.
 - Trustees have a very good overview of the work of the academy and receive detailed reports from the principal on students' performance and the academy's financial position. However, they do not receive sufficient information about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and this limits the extent to which they can hold managers to account for making further improvements in the quality of students' experiences.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.**
 - Managers have good policies and procedures to ensure that students are safe while at ALRA. Students receive good information about the support available to them at the academy and with living independently. Managers complete suitable checks on staff and record these well and staff receive appropriate safeguarding training.
 - Managers have responded well to the requirements of the new Prevent duty. They have a good action plan in place with arrangements to provide training to both staff and students.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

is good

- Teachers have very good experience of the theatre, television and radio industries and use this well to inspire the students. Teachers frequently reinforce the importance of what is being learned to students' future employment. For example, teachers remind students of the importance of being able to perform to a consistently high standard throughout a production run, and not just for individual performances.
- Staff make good use of feedback from students and external examiners to revise how they assess students. Teachers assess students frequently and provide constructive feedback which students use well to improve their work. For example, second year students received useful feedback on their initial performances of scenes from plays by Chekhov and were able to apply what they had learnt to subsequent performances.
- Staff create a good, professional working ethos in lessons and establish among the students a strong

sense of the ensemble. First year students apply themselves very well to improvisation exercises and learn to bring about changes in mood and status through their performance. All students feel able to say what they think and reflect with maturity on their own and others' work. However, students in the second and third year of study lack a sufficiently detailed critical language to assess, and comment on their work fully.

- Teachers assess students' abilities well at the start of the course in order to identify those who need extra help to achieve. These students receive appropriate support and successfully gain their qualifications.
- Teachers monitor students' progress very closely and have a very good awareness of each student's training needs. They set precise targets with students following assessments, with a good focus on different aspects of their development, such as in voice or movement, to help students improve.
- Teachers provide effective guidance to students early in their training on the difference between stage and television performance. Students are confident to act in front of the camera and, particularly when they are acting characters close to their own age, perform scenes with considerable conviction.
- In the selection of performance work in the second year of the programme, teachers do not adequately ensure that all students are given comparable challenges in their training. For a minority of students the choice of material and the directorial approach taken result in them making slow progress in aspects of their core training. In the majority of cases, directors take students through a rigorous rehearsal process through which they learn to improve their performance skills. In a minority of cases students do not develop their characterisation sufficiently and rely too much on guidance from the directors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Students' attendance, punctuality, enthusiasm for, and application to their work are good. Teachers set high standards for students' attendance, in line with industry expectations, and students arrive at lessons and rehearsals ready to learn.
- Students receive good guidance prior to joining the academy and have realistic expectations of what to expect. Staff provide effective guidance regarding applications for funding and students receive very effective support with aspects of life outside their studies, such as in negotiations with landlords and advice regarding healthy living. Students receive good guidance on how to present themselves professionally on social media, and how to stay safe online.
- Students take part in a wide range of projects and activities outside lessons to develop their experience of, and skills for, work. Students learn about different jobs in the industry by taking on technical roles or walk-on parts at high profile theatres. They gain useful skills such as script-writing to broaden their employment options. They also have extra workshops, such as in yoga, to develop their movement skills further.
- Teachers provide students with good skills to learn independently. For example, students learn how to operate the radio studio on their own and then use the facility for their further independent study.
- Students quickly understand the importance of working as a company and are very respectful of each other. Most students gain confidence in their performance skills, both on stage and on set for film and television acting.
- Students write competently and express themselves accurately in their portfolios. They have good oral communication skills and are able to share their views clearly, for example when reflecting on their assessed performances.
- Staff work well with students to raise their awareness of contemporary social issues and to support them to appreciate the diverse world in which they live and work. For example, staff cast students in a wide range of roles through which they gain a good appreciation of the lives of others.
- A small minority of students do not adhere well enough to the professional expectations set by teachers regarding appropriate rehearsal or workshop dress. For example, a few students do not wear suitable shoes or clothing to help them with appropriate movement when rehearsing a classical play.
- Staff do not yet liaise with a sufficiently wide range of agents to meet all students' employment ambitions.

Outcomes for learners are good

- Most students make good progress. For the past three years all students who completed their actor training achieved their qualifications. The large majority produce work of a high standard, often exceeding the requirements of the qualification.

- The standard of students' work is good. First year students gain core performance skills quickly, such as sight-reading. Second and third year students, and those on the one year diploma, work effectively as company members, both in live and recorded performances.
- Staff create a good professional working ethos and students enjoy their courses. The majority of students find work within the theatre, film, television or related industries.
- Managers use data well to monitor the performance of different groups of learners and no significant gaps exist.
- Since the previous inspection the proportion of students who have completed their training has been high. However, in 2014/15 too many students did not continue from the first year to the second year of training.
- A small minority of students are not signed with agents on completing their course, limiting their opportunities for employment.

Provider details

Type of provider	Dance and drama college
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	67
Principal/Chief executive officer	Mr Adrian Hall
Website address	www.alra.co.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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	65
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	0	0	0	0	0	0		
	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
	0		0		0			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14–16		0						
Funding received from		Education Funding Agency (EFA)						
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:		Not applicable						

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Rieks Drijver, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nick Moseley	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Young	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the principal, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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