



Cambridge Performing Arts at Bodywork



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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Inspection Report

Audience
Post-sixteen

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Cambridge Performing Arts at Bodywork
Type of college:	Performing arts college
Head of college:	Theresa Kerr
Address of college:	25–29 Glisson Road Cambridge CB1 2HA
Telephone number:	01223 314461
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Name of reporting inspector:	Peter Nelson HMI
Dates of inspection:	31 October–3 November 2005

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

Cambridge Performing Arts at Bodywork was established in 1990. It evolved as a family business established by the present proprietor, who offered a broad programme of performing arts classes in Cambridge in the mid 1970s. In 1984, the classes were relocated to newly converted studios in a former Victorian furniture warehouse in Cambridge. The college established a three-year, full-time course in 1990, and in 2003 joined the dance and drama award scheme. The college is now a limited company with charitable status. Its vision statement is 'to inspire all with the glorious creativity and the discipline of the arts'.

Bodywork now offers a broad range of courses including: the three-year Trinity diploma (with two specialist routes of professional dance and musical theatre), a one-year foundation course, a one-year intensive course, and a range of children's evening and weekend courses. It also provides dance classes for pupils in many local schools.

At the time of inspection in October 2005, there were 130 students enrolled on the three-year professional dance and musical theatre courses. Some 18 students out of 49 in the first year of the course, 19 students out of 46 in the second year and 19 out of 35 in the third year were in receipt of Department for Education and Skills (DfES) dance and drama awards. There are 35 members of staff who teach regularly at the college. Additional guest teachers visit from time to time throughout the year.

This is the first full inspection of Bodywork conducted by Ofsted.

How effective is the college?

Inspectors judged the quality of training in dance and musical theatre to be outstanding and the leadership and management of the college to be good. The main strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- strong leadership
- high standards of performance
- very good teaching
- valuable links with the performing arts profession
- very good student welfare
- strong and beneficial community links.

What should be improved

- deficiencies in some studio accommodation
- the strategic and business planning cycle.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the section on dance and musical theatre in the full report.

Students' views of the college

Students' views of the college were taken into account and are summarised below.

What students like about the college

- the small, close-knit community
- the use of guest teachers from the performing arts industry
- the strong and supportive culture
- the high technical standards demanded in jazz and contemporary dance.

What they feel could be improved

- the organisation of the timetable, particularly the schedules during performances
 - the range of ability groups to accommodate different abilities in dance
 - preparation for those beginning *pointe* work
 - the poorly sprung floor at St Paul's church.
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Part B: The dance and musical theatre course

Inspectors judged the provision to be outstanding (grade 1).

Strengths

- high standards of performance in jazz, singing and musical theatre
- very good teaching
- strong links with the performing arts profession
- diverse range of jazz styles
- very good student welfare
- good procedures to attract male students and those from minority ethnic heritages.

Weaknesses

- the limitations of some studio accommodation.

Scope of provision

1. The college offers a broad curriculum which aims to provide students with the necessary dance and musical theatre skills, leading to the national diploma in professional dance or professional musical theatre. The core subjects include classical ballet, jazz styles (from mainstream American jazz to the Matt Mattox isolation technique), contemporary dance techniques, musical theatre repertoire, singing, acting and tap. Contextual studies, fitness, health and safety, professional employment skills, *pas de deux* work and Pilates support the technical and practical studies. There are many performance opportunities for students. Dance students perform with the Grads Performance Company in their final year, working with guest professional choreographers. They are also involved in workshops and lecture demonstrations in local schools. The musical theatre option involves work on varied musical repertoire throughout their final year and the students perform their work in a showcase final year production. The college has an in-house agency to help students into work.

Achievements and standards

2. The standard of students' work is very high in virtually all the disciplines, but particularly so in jazz, singing and musical theatre skills. Students work with dedication and a sense of professionalism. They produce seamlessly integrated ensemble work and some outstanding individual performances. In ballet, first year students work at a satisfactory level, given their limited prior experience; by the third year they demonstrate how they have gained the confidence and technique to work successfully and independently. In one particularly challenging jazz technique lesson, students demonstrated an outstanding level of technical expertise and performance skills. In acting, students gave confident and insightful monologue

readings and responded intelligently to mock interview auditions. In singing, students demonstrated significant aptitude with a style well suited to gaining employment in the musical theatre industry. As in all the disciplines, the students worked with a lively responsiveness and showed admirable peer support.

3. Retention rates have been improving steadily, from 74% in 2002/03 to 94% in 2004/05. The employment rates for graduates are also improving year on year, and the college has been very successful in tracking former students' progress. Of the 34 recent graduates in 2005, 21 have already gained employment in national and world tours, cruise ships, cabaret and modelling.

Quality of education and training

4. The quality of teaching in lessons is very high. During the inspection, all lessons observed were good or better, and most were very good. Teachers demand very high technical standards from their students in all disciplines. The dividing of students into different groups by ability for dance subjects has resulted in small, high quality classes. First year ballet students with little prior experience are taught skilfully, and the planning of lessons is good. In one jazz class, the teacher demanded continuous effort in core strengthening during the warm-up, this then succeeded in obtaining absolute precision from the group in capturing a difficult and unusual style. In another class, the teacher changed the 'front' continuously during an *enchainement*, culminating in the two halves of the class facing each other in a highly charged, competitive performance atmosphere. In a third year musical theatre repertoire class, the teacher demanded a high level of passionate commitment during the vocal warm-up leading to an excellent ensemble version of the song being rehearsed. He then introduced an original cast member of the stage musical to choreograph the routine. This exposure to current West End practice significantly enhanced students' learning. The acting teacher used convincing mock audition interviews, including a request for unrehearsed monologues and cappella singing from individual candidates, to expose students to the trepidations of real auditions. The students responded with confidence and some showed a remarkably mature depth of character in their monologues.

5. The college has considerably expanded its studio resources in the past few years. Two new studios have been built on the main site and additional space is also available in three nearby buildings. The facilities in the nearby church and sports complex in particular offer large and light spaces for dance and rehearsals. There are still a few unsuitable areas in the original building. Some studios are relatively small, ceilings tend to be low and some lessons suffer from intrusive noise from other studios. New information technology facilities have recently been installed, and are extensively used by students. Although the current book stock is relatively small, the college has recently acquired lockable display cupboards for the library, which will enable the college to expand the stock. Teaching staff are highly qualified and experienced. Teachers serve as valuable professional role models for

their students. For example, inexperienced male ballet students benefit from working with a dynamic male teacher. The use of visiting working professionals is also of great benefit to students.

6. All students are assessed regularly in their key disciplines. Formal assessments are held twice a year and are rigorous with clear assessment criteria. Tutors use the first week of the following term as 'feedback week' during which teachers discuss individually with their students, how they have progressed and what they need to do to improve. Feedback to students is generally of a high standard.

7. The wide-ranging curriculum offers good pathways to careers in both dance and musical theatre. Many of the technique classes mix both as they are streamed by ability. On occasions, tight timetabling constraints result in students' late arrival for lessons if their previous lesson has overrun. The problem is exacerbated slightly by the split nature of the site. The college has strong, beneficial links with the local community. It also has an excellent reputation for attracting male students as well as a diverse mix of students from minority ethnic heritages. The establishment of foundation courses has helped attract a number of late starting students, a significant proportion of whom are then accepted on to the main course.

8. The small size of the student body allows the college staff to give good individual attention to each student. The well-designed student handbook provides helpful advice on how to seek pastoral support. Each student is assigned a personal tutor. Formal tutorials take place at least termly, but staff willingly provide individual support and guidance to any student who requests it. There is a student welfare officer responsible for the students' general well-being who liaises with an in-house counsellor if the students need extra help with personal issues. The support students receive is extremely caring and of a high quality. The in-house agency effectively provides extensive audition opportunities for the students as well as successfully securing short-term contracts for some students during their time at college.

Part C: Leadership and management

Inspectors judged leadership and management to be good (grade 2).

Strengths

- the extensive improvements made since the initial Ofsted visit
- strong leadership at senior management and course level
- good operational management
- the strong commitment to continued development, embedding new policies and quality assurance procedures
- beneficial community links.

Weaknesses

- the underdeveloped strategic, business planning and appraisal cycle
- some key policies not yet fully in place or implemented.

9. Following a short quality review visit by Ofsted in 2003, a list of strengths and areas for improvement was sent to the college. Since this visit, the college has taken very positive action to address most issues. Actions include: improvements to accommodation and resources, increased focus on the quality of drama provision within the curriculum, improved audition procedures, greater clarity to staff roles and job descriptions, and improvements to the college's mission, values and management structure.

10. The principal of the college provides very strong and focused leadership. She is supported by three capable and dedicated senior managers including a course leader, financial director and registrar/student welfare officer. The overall management structure of the college has recently been redefined to provide greater clarity of roles and responsibilities. There are six academic heads of department and a small team of support staff. This management team is highly effective. The college's mission has recently been reviewed and restated. The college's strategic direction is implicit from the views expressed by the principal, publicity materials, course specifications and long-term planning. However, overall formal strategic and business planning mechanisms are underdeveloped. There is no document which explicitly summarises the strategy, sets specific targets and objectives or identifies timescales or cost implications of proposed actions.

11. The company trustees are highly committed and knowledgeable about the college and add value to the overall running of the college. Although they are not involved in monitoring the quality and strategic developments of the college, they help to ensure that the college remains financially stable year on year, and that recent major expenditure has been carried out prudently and has helped improve the overall quality of education and training.

12. Despite the college's very high reliance on part-time staff, the operational management and communication across the college are good. Heads of department are very experienced practitioners and ensure that subject strands within the curriculum are well designed, efficiently led and tightly managed. There is a strong reliance on informal day-to-day communication between staff and students which, given the size of the college, works well. This is backed up by memos to staff which are circulated in registers and keep staff suitably informed on relevant issues. There are sufficient meetings which result in succinct minuted action points. However, agendas seldom consider matters arising from previous meetings, and the meetings do not check that actions previously agreed have been carried out. The college has a strong bond with the local community through its evening and weekend classes, and productive links with schools and other community groups.

13. The college has a satisfactory lesson observation process in place. The scheme ensures that key managers monitor and provide constructive feedback on the standard of teaching of individual members of staff, which helps to maintain the very high standard of teaching that was observed during the inspection. The college is in the very early stages of introducing an appraisal system which, it is intended, will ensure staff performance is reviewed against their job descriptions, and that targets, actions and staff development needs are identified more clearly. At the time of inspection, however, this system had not been fully implemented. Although there is not yet any formal mechanism for identifying and prioritising staff development needs through appraisal, the college actively encourages staff to remain involved in a broad range of professional performance activities. In addition, several staff have taken the initiative, and have completed a range of educational and training activities including a degree, certificate of education, and training in Pilates technique.

14. The college has well-developed systems for capturing and reviewing a broad range of relevant information as part of the quality review cycle. This information includes the quality of teaching, students' views on the quality of provision, and the career progression of leavers. Shortly prior to this inspection, the college completed its first self-assessment report which accurately identifies the majority of the key strengths and areas for improvement for the college. Whilst many staff are aware of the document, few are fully conversant with the key actions and priorities identified in the report. The college acknowledges that the completion of the self-assessment process has been a valuable developmental exercise, and has stated its commitment to continue developing and refining its quality assurance procedures.

15. The college's set of policies and procedures cover most of the relevant topics. These are contained in the staff and student handbooks and include the college charter, relevant information on punctuality, behaviour, health and safety,

student discipline, dress code for students, equal opportunities, disability statement, pastoral care, injury, learning support, and physical correction policy. These documents are used as part of the effective induction programme for staff and students. The college does not yet have policies to address certain issues including grievance, bullying and race relations. The college does not adhere to its stated equal opportunities policy on recruitment and selection of staff. Procedures for monitoring and reviewing certain policies and procedures such as health and safety, equal opportunities, risk assessments and race relations are underdeveloped.

16. The college manages its resources effectively. Following the college's inclusion in the dance and drama award scheme, the number of students has increased significantly on the diploma programme. The college has managed this growth skilfully; it has reduced group sizes and ensured astute timetabling and management of the teaching programme to make the best use of the broad range, variety and quality of spaces available for lessons. The college manages its financial affairs effectively. The college has achieved a small year on year surplus to create a modest reserve and has received clear audit reports on its annual set of accounts. The college achieves good value for money, given its financial stability, high quality provision, good retention rates, good employment destinations and significant recent improvements in the quality of provision.

Notes

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