

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
JUNE 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION JULY
2001

Liverpool Theatre School



ADULT LEARNING
I N S P E C T O R A T E

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- ◆ work-based training for all people over 16
- ◆ provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- ◆ the University for Industry's *learnirect* provision
- ◆ adult and community learning
- ◆ training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Grading

In summarising their judgements about the quality of provision in curriculum or occupational areas and about the quality of leadership and management, including quality assurance and equality of opportunity, inspectors use a five-point scale. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- ◆ grade 1 – outstanding
- ◆ grade 2 – good
- ◆ grade 3 – satisfactory
- ◆ grade 4 – unsatisfactory
- ◆ grade 5 – very weak.

SUMMARY

The original inspection of Liverpool Theatre School was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for trainee support and management of training. These areas have been reinspected against the requirements of the *Common Inspection Framework* by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. The sections of the original report dealing with trainee support and management of training have been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website (www.ali.gov.uk).

The quality of training in performing arts at Liverpool Theatre School is excellent. Staff focus on the performance tradition and have strong links with the entertainment industry. Trainees are attentive and many achieve qualifications. Participation of people from under-represented groups is encouraged and promoted. Trainees' support is satisfactory. Trainees receive good initial advice and guidance. Induction to training is thorough. The results of the trainees' assessment of basic skills is not taken into account in training plans. The training programme is well organised, but arrangements for private study need improving. Data on the organisation are gathered systematically but are not yet used to best effect. The staff appraisal and staff development programmes are good. The quality of teaching is monitored regularly. The quality assurance arrangements are insufficiently systematic and do not cover all aspects of the provision.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Media & design	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	4
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Trainee support	3
Management of training	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ♦ excellent performing arts training
- ♦ excellent achievement and retention rates
- ♦ strong links with the performing arts and entertainment industry
- ♦ exemplary fairness of treatment
- ♦ comprehensive guidance and assessment prior to enrolment

- ◆ excellent induction arrangements
- ◆ well-organised training programme
- ◆ clear and effective policies and procedures
- ◆ good arrangements for staff appraisal and staff development
- ◆ collective commitment to improvement

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of some training resources
- ◆ insufficient use basic skills assessment results to identify trainees' training needs
- ◆ failure to set trainees clear targets during progress reviews
- ◆ no systematic evaluation, review and action-planning process

INTRODUCTION

1. Liverpool Theatre School (the School) is a limited company with two directors who are the principals of the School. It was formed in 1930 to provide training and practice in the performing arts for under-privileged young people in Liverpool. The School has recently moved to a refurbished building in south Liverpool. The principals of the School have overall responsibility for organisation and management of the education and training programmes. They are the only full-time members of staff. There are 11 part-time members of staff. Several of them have long-term contracts and substantial weekly timetables. Occasional 'guest tutors' also contribute to the programmes offered by the School.

2. The School provides education and training in the performing arts to people of all ages from a variety of backgrounds. Previously, the School offered work-based training as a subcontractor to another training provider. It now has a direct contract with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Through this contract the School offers training leading to general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) at intermediate level and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in the performing arts at level 3. In addition, the School offers courses in performing arts at intermediate level through a franchise from a further education college. The Department for Education and Skills has recently approved Liverpool Theatre School as a specialist performing arts centre. It will receive funding to offer a programme leading to a nationally recognised qualification in musical theatre. The programme will commence in September 2001.

3. The School is also an approved assessment centre for NVQs in customer service and training and development, and for a wide range of professional body qualifications in the performing arts. All performing arts trainees work towards professional body qualifications and some also work towards additional NVQs.

4. At the time of reinspection, there were 33 trainees directly funded through the local LSC and 48 full-time and part-time students following programmes through the franchise agreement with a local college.

5. All trainees are based at the School. It is the practice of the School that trainees are not placed with employers in the entertainment industries until their skills are sufficiently advanced to secure employment. This is usually at, or near the completion of, their training programme. In order to gain experience of professional practice, trainees mount and present live performances at the School and venues throughout the Liverpool region for the general public. Contrary to general practice, several accomplished trainees gain contracted seasonal employment experience with professional companies during their period of training. Groups of trainees are frequently requested to perform at events mounted by charitable bodies and professional associations in the region.

6. In support of its activities, the School can rely on past pupils who are now established in the world of popular entertainment. The School also draws on the experience of other professional practitioners to contribute to the training curriculum alongside a body of established training staff, all of who have substantial experience in the performing arts.

7. The School is based in the Merseyside region, which includes five local authority districts: Knowsley, Liverpool City, Sefton, St. Helens and the Wirral. In April 2001, the unemployment rate in Merseyside was 7 per cent, compared with 3.9 per cent in the northwest of England, and 3.3 per cent in the country as a whole.

8. In 2000, the proportions of school leavers in Knowsley, Liverpool and Sefton, the local education authority areas closest to the School, who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above, were 25 per cent, 35.3 per cent and 48.4 per cent, respectively, compared with the national average for England of 49.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

9. Prior to the original inspection of June 2000, all Liverpool Theatre School staff made a contribution to the self-assessment process. Awareness-raising workshops were held, supported by Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council to ensure staff had a clear understanding of the process. The findings and grades in the report were drawn together and agreed by all staff before publication. The grades awarded by inspectors following the original inspection agreed with those in the company's report for the occupational area, equal opportunities and quality assurance. Lower grades than those given by the company were awarded in the generic aspects of trainee support and management of training.

10. The School produced a further self-assessment report in March 2001. Prior to the reinspection of trainee support and management of training, inspectors studied this revised self-assessment report and the action plan drawn up after the original inspection. They agreed with the grades given in the revised self-assessment report for the two generic areas being reinspected.

11. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days carrying out the original inspection at Liverpool Theatre School. They examined trainees' records, portfolios of evidence for assessment, awarding body documents, teaching and training materials, company policies and procedures, other documents and contracts. Inspectors also observed and interviewed all MTEC-funded trainees and inspected 10 training, review and assessment sessions, seven of which were graded. They held 34 interviews with Theatre School staff, and attended a public performance given by trainees and students of the School.

12. A team of two inspectors spent a total of six days at Liverpool Theatre School in July 2001 carrying out a reinspection of trainee support and management of training. They held interviews with staff, trainees and students. They looked at the records of trainees and students, policies and written procedures. Inspectors explored developments in the School's practices which had taken place since the original inspection.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Media & design		4	3			7
Total	0	4	3	0	0	7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Media & design (performing arts)

Grade 2

13. Liverpool Theatre School delivers part-time and full-time performing arts training for children and young people aged between 3 to 25 years, including programmes within a work-based training contract with MTEC. This offers trainees intermediate and advanced GNVQs in the performing arts and entertainment industries. Trainees may also take the delivering artform development session NVQ level 3 and some trainees have gained a customer service qualification at NVQ level 2. A number of trainees also gained assessor qualifications. In addition, trainees have the opportunities to achieve professional body qualifications in both teaching and performance, offered by professional bodies including the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, Allied Dance Association and International Dance Teachers Association. There were 31 trainees on the programmes at the time of inspection. Trainees complete intermediate GNVQs in one year and then have the option to move to advanced GNVQs or NVQs at level 3. There are no trainees with employed status. Twenty-nine of the current trainees are women. Two trainees are from minority ethnic groups. There were 12 leavers in 1999-2000, five with NVQs and seven with NVQs and a job. In 1998-99, of the nine leavers, five completed with NVQs and a job and four left with an NVQ. The 1997-98 four trainees left with NVQs and jobs and the remaining three with NVQs. Inspectors agreed with the strengths in the organisation's self-assessment but found a different set of weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that in the organisation's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent performing arts training
- ◆ powerful focus on performance tradition
- ◆ excellent retention and achievement rates
- ◆ strong professional links with the performing arts and entertainment industry

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate study space and learning resources
- ◆ trainees lack motivation to complete written work

14. All the trainees work on the site of the Liverpool Theatre School for the delivery of the NVQ programmes. There are no work placements or on-the-job training arrangements. Elements of the intermediate GNVQ are assessed when trainees participate in performances outside the School. Performing arts training is of excellent quality and led by a good range of experienced and dedicated staff. Classes are given with attention to technique as well as creativity, by teaching staff who have many years of experience and lead groups of trainees through sessions at

a good pace. Within dance and drama, staff demonstrate movements, routines and posture to the class themselves. A great deal of individual attention is given to each trainee who benefits from correction of their posture or style in dance classes. Trainees' performance skills progress rapidly throughout the programme. They build repertoire, technique, body strength and control. Intelligently structured timetable planning allows clear links to be made between the GNVQ units and the additional professional and teaching qualification. These elements are layered into the vocational programme and benefit the trainees by constantly raising their performance standards. In most cases and practical work that is prepared for examinations is used to complete elements of the intermediate GNVQ. The professional qualifications enhance opportunities for entry into a fuller range of performance-related work. Among many employers, there is a strong recognition and familiarity with the professional and teaching examinations. Trainees therefore benefit from obtaining these alongside their GNVQ. Good physical preparation and a range of performance skills throughout the theatre arts are achieved. This ensures that trainees are adequately prepared for the realities of the tough and demanding regime of working performing artists.

15. Staff at the School transmit their passion and enthusiasm for the performing arts to the trainees. A powerful performance tradition is sustained throughout the School and every trainee has real commitment to succeed. The professionalism needed to survive in the industry is imparted from staff to trainees. The trainees understand the demands of the profession they are training for and respond with the discipline required.

16. Retention rates are high. Achievement rates are sustained at a high level, both in the GNVQ programmes and within the professional awards and examinations. In the last contract year all trainees who started their programme of training completed and achieved their qualification aim. Attendance is good, with systems to follow up trainees' non-attendance.

17. Knowledgeable and professional teaching staff draw on their many years in the arts and entertainment field and provide realistic advice and guidance for supporting trainees' initial ventures into the employment field. Actors, dancers and musicians in current employment frequently come in as guest lecturers. Recently, casting directors from the film industry, pantomime and variety have given the trainees insight into the current state of the employment market. They also offer contemporary shifts to the curriculum, which complement the more traditional aspects that are offered on the timetable. The School ensures that trainees benefit from its wide-reaching network and contacts within the industry. The principals have a good relationship with entertainment management within the business and arrangements to secure the donation of ex-professional costumes for the trainees' use. There is an extensive collection of stage costume that is housed in a separate building close by. Other links allow the School to offer trainees performance opportunities and work experience, often with ex-trainees who remain extremely loyal to the staff and current trainees.

18. The premises have good practical teaching and rehearsal studios and theatre seating approximately 120. Spaces are clean, light, warm and airy and there are suitable floors designed for all types of dance. The School has invested in refurbishing the premises and in technical equipment to support performances. The teaching and rehearsal spaces are sometimes limited when there is a particularly large class and noise transference between rooms occasionally disrupts sessions. However, the School has no study centre, where trainees could access computers and other research materials. There is a lack of good study space generally. If trainees need to extend their knowledge or research topics for their assessments, scripts, music, reference books to place plays and musical in a historical context are not available on site. Staff rely on their own personal copies of plays, music and texts. Trainees are encouraged to attend the local library if they want to use study materials but specialist materials are not available from this source.

19. Critiques of trainees' performances to their peers are encouraged and help to develop trainees' analytical skills. These feedback sessions on each other's practical work support the trainees' written assignments. Due to the often-overpowering desire to refine performance skills trainees often struggle to maintain a balance between performance and completing written assignments.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

20. The School has an equal opportunities policy, which is reviewed annually. The policy promotes an environment of respect and names a contact, should there be any breaches of the policy. A confidentiality policy reinforces the requirements of the equal opportunities policy. There are clear procedures for grievance, appeals and disciplinary issues. There is reference to equal opportunities in the School's marketing and in the trainees and staff's induction programmes. Over the past three years, the trainees have been mainly white young women. None of the full-time staff are from minority ethnic communities and the principals of the School, as well as two of the three permanent staff, are women. The self-assessment report is insufficiently self-critical. It identifies the first but not the second strength and it fails to identify either of the weaknesses in relation to failing to monitor or adequately promote equal opportunities. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that in the organisation's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ participation by disadvantaged people encouraged
- ◆ exemplary fairness of treatment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little monitoring of equal opportunities data

◆ poor strategy to promote equal opportunities

21. The School was founded in 1930 to provide people from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds in Liverpool with experience in the performing arts. The School has retained this ethos and there is a caring and tolerant environment. Scholarships are offered to students who come from a disadvantaged background. These scholarships enable the trainees to access professional qualifications in drama and dance as well as the MTEC-funded GNVQ qualifications. Throughout the year advertisements are placed in the local press to attract people from all backgrounds to apply for an audition. Currently five out of the 31 trainees on the TEC-funded courses are receiving extra support. The School has excellent links with the local community, including those Schools and organisations dedicated to assisting socially and economically deprived people. Personal contacts of the staff also help with sponsorships. A local Catholic organisation sponsors trainees and in return the students provide a performance annually to help raise funds for disabled people to visit the shrine of Lourdes in France.

22. The School has a caring, protective environment in which all are treated fairly. Criteria are set for the initial audition for entry onto a course. While on the course, all trainees are informed of potential job opportunities and there is no favouritism in selecting those who can go forward to real auditions. Trainees with dyslexia are helped by the tutors to understand the requirements of their professional examinations. Where appropriate they are also helped to memorise drama parts. During the GNVQ examinations these trainees can have the questions read to them and are given extra time to complete their examination work if required.

23. Equal opportunities data are collected to comply with TEC requirements. However, these data are not systematically analysed by the School to predict trends. The data from the past three years shows that the most of the trainees on the TEC-funded courses have been white women. In 1997-98 only three out of 13 trainees were men and there were no trainees from minority ethnic groups. In 1998-99, two out of eight starters were men and again there were no trainees from minority ethnic groups. In the current year four trainees are from minority ethnic backgrounds and two out of 22 starters are men. The ethnic origin of applicants is not collected, so there is no means of identifying trends in the applicants, indicating those who are accepted and those who are rejected. Neither are data retained with regard to the progression of trainees on completion. Equal opportunities is not a standing agenda item for management or team meetings.

24. There is no strategy to counter the gender or ethnic imbalances in the recruitment of trainees onto TEC-funded programmes. Some visits have been made to secondary schools outside the traditional catchment area in an effort to attract more men but this has not benefited from a coherent approach. There has been no equal opportunities training for staff. The induction for trainees includes reference to equal opportunities but its presentation does not benefit from the wealth of talent in presentation skills in this School.

25. There have not been any applications from people with mobility difficulties

and so no adaptations have been made to the access to all parts of the building. Within the building there is limited access for trainees with mobility difficulties. However, a potential trainee who was offered a place last year has since contracted meningitis and as a result has lost several fingers and a leg. This trainee's place is being honoured in the autumn. The fact that she could continue with her chosen career in the performing arts at the Liverpool Theatre School has helped her recovery from the disease.

Trainee support

Grade 3

26. Potential trainees are invited to audition and they discuss their aspirations with a tutor. Trainees receive an initial assessment of their occupational and basic skills. Their induction programme covers health and safety issues and the School's policies and procedures. All trainees attend training sessions at the School. Personal tutors conduct 12-weekly reviews of trainees' progress. They provide individual trainees with support when this is requested. Trainees can attend a weekly session in which they receive individual learning support from one of the principals. Contact numbers for emergencies and counselling support are given to all trainees. Work experience involves trainees in live performances. Careers advice is offered to trainees at all stages of their training programme. A senior tutor is responsible for co-ordinating trainee support.

At the original inspection, inspectors identified the following the main weaknesses:

- ◆ poor review process
- ◆ lack of formal target-setting
- ◆ inadequate procedures for additional support

The School produced a detailed action plan to build on the strengths and rectify the weaknesses identified in the original inspection report, and it has implemented this effectively. Trainee support is now satisfactory. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the revised self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive guidance for and assessment of potential trainees
- ◆ thorough induction process
- ◆ some good employment opportunities for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little use of initial assessment to identify trainees' additional support needs
- ◆ failure to set trainees short-term targets during progress reviews

27. Trainees arrive on the programme by several routes. Some come directly from school, some transfer from further education provision, and others follow

recommendations from dance schools or make enquiries to the School themselves. Some progress from the School's part-time classes and Saturday sessions to become full-time pupils. School staff attend secondary schools' open days as part of recruitment activities and to encourage more male school leavers to participate in the performing arts programme. All applicants are invited to audition for places on the courses. The guidance and enrolment process is thorough and aims to ensure that all who enrol understand that they must work hard to achieve their target qualification. At the audition, each applicant is given the opportunity to demonstrate his or her ability or potential, in both drama and dance. They do this through a set piece of their choosing. Potential trainees who are experienced in drama but have no experience in dance may be asked to copy a routine of steps, as demonstrated by the tutor or a current trainee. Those who have dance but not drama experience may be asked to read a piece or they may be given a situation around which they can improvise. The tutors grade the applicants' performances in terms of the applicants' appearance, ability and potential. The tutors require applicants who are inexperienced in drama and dance to have talent and flair, confidence, motivation, and show that they understand what they are doing. Applicants who are not accepted but who demonstrate that they have potential in drama and dance are given the opportunity to audition again. Those potential trainees who do not show any talent or aptitude for the performing arts are advised to consult their career counsellor and seek a more suitable career path.

28. There is an excellent extended induction programme, which is carried out from the point when the applicant is accepted in the spring or summer to when he or she starts the course of study in the autumn. Applicants who are accepted attend a 'taster day' when their performing arts skills are assessed. During the day, the new trainees are given activities in dance, drama or singing by one member of staff while another assesses their skills. Following this initial assessment of their skills, the trainees are then advised at what level they should begin their training. Some trainees are accepted onto level 3 of the programme. The taster day is an excellent means of introducing the first-year trainees to the content of the course and the standards expected of them. In the autumn, the majority of trainees begin their programme and they then receive an induction day covering policies and procedures. Trainees are also given basic skills tests on this day. About one week after the induction day, one of the principals of the School goes over the content of the induction day. Trainees maintain a checklist of the content. Second-year and third-year trainees receive copies of revised policies and where appropriate, can receive accreditation of their prior learning. For instance, many of the third-year trainees have completed generic NVQ units. Trainees who enrol at other times of the year are given a shortened version of the induction programme.

29. The staff expect high standards of performance and behaviour from the trainees. They have had professional experience and are up to date with current practices in the industry. The School maintains an excellent network with local companies, professional organisations and successful past pupils. This network is used extensively to help trainees, and especially dance trainees, find employment. Employment opportunities for drama trainees are harder to find but auditions for

trainees have been organised at the School for film and theatre work. Dance trainees have had experience in a variety of performances both in the United Kingdom and abroad. Several trainees find work as extras in television soap operas. The tutors display flexibility in accommodating the needs of trainees who are absent on work experience. They provide these trainees with extra tuition on a one-to-one basis, if necessary. Trainees receive help to prepare them for work. A tutor helps them look through stage magazines for work and job opportunities are posted on the School's noticeboard. Help is given with audition techniques and applications. Staff make sure that drama trainees, who are applying to a particular theatre, understand how important it is that they find out all they can about the theatre and its artistic director.

30. Trainees are given initial tests in basic skills but the results of these are not used to identify any additional learning support they may need. Trainees' learning difficulties are usually identified later when the trainees fail to complete assignments. Trainees whose needs are identified, however, attend weekly additional learning support sessions and express their satisfaction with them. Following a staff development event, the senior tutor intends that new trainees' results in basic skills tests will be taken into account when drawing up individual training plans, and that personal tutors will be informed of any difficulties the trainees may have with literacy and numeracy.

31. Each trainee has a personal tutor. Wherever possible, the tutor is from a discipline other than that of the trainee. Dance trainees have drama tutors and vice versa. Trainees appreciate the opportunity to discuss their progress and any concerns they may have with a member of the School's staff who is not their primary subject tutor. Subject tutors will contact a personal tutor of a trainee if they sense there are problems, other than those related to performance, affecting the trainee's work. Usually, no records are kept of these personal tutorial sessions. Trainees receive formal reviews of their progress every 12 weeks when each trainee has a 15-minute interview with his or her tutor. In the week before a progress review takes place, the senior tutor gives all staff with whom the trainee has worked, a form on which they are asked to provide written comments on the trainee's performance. A copy of the completed form is given to the trainee's personal tutor who carries out the review. The tutor takes the comments on the form into account, together with information about the trainee's assignment work, attendance, punctuality and behaviour, when forming an overall evaluation of the extent of the trainee's progress and personal development. During the progress review, the personal tutor completes a review form. Many of these review forms, however, are not completed in sufficient detail and their content is bland. Short-term targets for trainees are seldom entered on the forms. Trainees are not given a copy of the review form. The feedback on some assignment sheets about trainees' work is wordy and imprecise. In some instances, it relates to the trainees' behaviour and skills of presentation rather than trainees' progress towards achieving a qualification.

Management of training

Grade 3

32. Overall responsibility for the management of training at the School rests with its principals. The School has a three-year strategic plan and a current business plan with operational objectives. These are contained in a manual, which also includes a number of organisational policies and procedures. The manual is available to all staff. A course leader, who also teaches on the programme, manages training leading to a GNVQ in performing arts at intermediate level. Similarly, there are course leaders for training leading to NVQs. A team of part-time teaching staff support the course leaders. With the exception of one, all staff are qualified assessors and several are qualified internal verifiers. Staff are appointed on the basis of whether or not they have appropriate experience and possess the skills needed in the training team. The School liaises with external organisations to help trainees find work placements and suitable employment.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ underdeveloped management and information systems
- ◆ policies and procedures not established in practice
- ◆ no formal staff review and development arrangements

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear sense of purpose throughout the organisation
- ◆ well-organised training programme
- ◆ effective policies and procedures
- ◆ good staff appraisal and arrangements for staff development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient use of management information in decision-making
- ◆ little use of information technology by trainees and staff

The School has made considerable progress in rectifying the weaknesses identified during the original inspection. Policies and procedures have been updated. Staff fully understand them and implement them effectively. Good arrangements have been established for staff appraisal. Management information is now collected systematically but is not used enough in planning and decision-making. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the revised self-assessment report. Management of training is now satisfactory.

33. Staff and trainees work together and have a clear sense of purpose. All are dedicated to achieving high standards in their craft. The School has a lively but disciplined atmosphere. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities. They make every effort to ensure that assessment and internal verification are carried out and recorded properly. They monitor trainees' progress through staff meetings, the tutorial system, regular and informal contact with one another, and paper-based

communication.

34. The School's senior managers have introduced training leading to GNVQs and NVQs and this complements training leading to professional body awards. The training programmes are well organised. There are clear curriculum plans. Trainees carry out assignments which stimulate their interest. Assessment is thorough and fair. Internal verification is sound and occurs at set points during the period of the training programme. The feedback verifiers give assessors on the validity of their assessments is seldom provided in writing. It rarely includes recommended action for the assessor to take.

35. The School has a range of policies and procedures to guide the work of staff. These are set out in a manual, which is readily accessible. The policies and procedures cover such matters as recruitment and induction, equality of opportunity, reviews of trainees' progress and assessment, staff appraisal and staff development. Staff review the policies to check that they are relevant and effective. The policies are also updated in the light of new legislation and the requirements of regulatory bodies. During the past year, several training events have taken place to ensure that staff understand the policies and procedures fully. Staff recognise that working to an appropriate set of policies and procedures helps them to improve their work with students and trainees.

36. The School's business plan is included in the School's manual of policies and procedures. The plan identifies a number of key organisational objectives to be achieved. Within the past year, staff have appraised themselves. Their contribution to helping the School fulfil its key organisational objectives has also been appraised. Through the appraisal process, a staff development programme has been drawn up for each member of staff. Some staff are working towards internal verifier qualifications and others are developing information technology skills. Staff are investigating the appropriateness of new qualifications to find out whether training leading to these would meet trainees' needs. Though in their early days, arrangements for staff appraisal and staff development are proving effective.

37. Staff make good use of their contacts with the profession and of their membership of professional associations to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. The School's managers arrange for all staff to meet from time to time to discuss curricular changes and developments. In addition, training events run by external bodies have been organised.

38. During the past year, the School set itself the objective of collecting data systematically on the background and attainments of applicants, and the retention and achievement rates of trainees. Such data are now being collected in accordance with a calendar. The School, however, has been unable to use relevant data effectively in planning and decision-making. A key member of staff is currently being trained to produce accurate and useful statistical records.

39. Few staff have information technology skills. Trainees make little use of

information technology. Staff write plans, maintain records and update assignments by hand. Most trainees' portfolios contain little material produced through information technology and the evidence in some is not presented well. Few staff or trainees have access to the Internet at the School. The School does not have any form of information technology network to help staff maintain records on trainees and share good practice more effectively. Without such a network, staff become frustrated at having to spend a disproportionate amount of time on administrative functions.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

40. The assurance of quality in the training curriculum at the School is through staff having uniformly high expectations of their own and trainees' work and operating within a self-critical culture. Staff view high levels of trainee retention and achievement as a key measure of quality assurance. There are few individual procedures and no over-arching framework for quality assurance within the School. In its self-assessment report the School did not demonstrate an understanding of the difference between management of training issues and assurance of quality. Self-assessment did not identify the real strengths and weakness of the organisation in this aspect but did correctly assess the grade, which is the same as that awarded by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ collective commitment to improvement
- ◆ regular monitoring to improve teaching quality

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no procedures to systematically review the quality of provision
- ◆ little formal action planning to aid improvement

41. Staff of the School demonstrate a collective commitment to improvement. They are active in professional performing arts associations and awarding bodies using these to maintain contemporary knowledge and update their practical teaching skills. Some staff are representatives on national training organisations setting standards for the sector. Others act as external examiners to professional qualification awarding bodies. The School brings all staff together for collective events to review and develop the curriculum. Staff carry out annual reviews of the teaching programmes offered by the School. These meetings result in recommendations and changes to the training.

42. Regular monitoring of teaching quality and standards is undertaken by professional examiners from the awarding bodies. Awards can only be offered if the quality of the teaching and training meets set national standards. School managers frequently observe classes and offer recommendations for improvement. Staff have confidence in their colleagues' abilities and experience and will often

ask colleagues to observe their teaching sessions and provide them with feedback.

43. There are no set procedures to systematically monitor and review the quality of provision. Evaluation by trainees is a recent development and though revised and in its second phase, the evaluations have not been used to improve practice. Evaluation from employers takes the form of letters of congratulation rather than the School seeking to draw informed critical appraisal of its work. Other than through the informality of the staff room and staff meetings there is little opportunity for staff to evaluate and review the work of the School in a measured way.

44. The absence of systematic evaluation and review at all levels throughout the organisation results in a lack of formal action planning and organisation-wide plans for improvement. While staff are very aware of the need to strive for continuous improvement, this is clearly focused on performance skills and does not embrace the wider aspects associated with training and learning.

45. The School's self-assessment report was published in March 2000. The document provides a context for the organisation against the social and economic background in which it operates. Appendices provide an historical record of trainees' achievements and destinations. The separate reports on the occupational and generic areas did not provide sufficient background against which the strengths and weakness in the document could be set. Strengths and weaknesses were supported by reference to an evidence base held by the School. The self-assessment was submitted without an action plan. This followed at a later date and set some achievable targets for the size and nature of the organisation.