



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards  
in Education

**Inspection report**  
**Academy of Live and Recorded Arts**  
**Drama College**

Date of inspection: 28 February - 4 March 2005

© Crown copyright 2005. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspects dance and drama colleges in receipt of awards allocated by the Department for Education and Skills.

Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted web site ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

# **Contents**

| <b>Section</b>                             | <b>Page</b> |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Basic information about the college</b> | <b>ii</b>   |
| <b>Part A: Summary</b>                     | <b>1</b>    |
| Information about the college              | 1           |
| How effective is the college?              | 1           |
| Students' view of the college              | 2           |
| <b>Part B: The Drama Course</b>            | <b>4</b>    |
| Strengths                                  | 4           |
| Weaknesses                                 | 4           |
| Scope of provision                         | 4           |
| Achievements and standards                 | 5           |
| Quality of education and training          | 5           |
| <b>Part C: Leadership and Management</b>   | <b>7</b>    |
| Strengths                                  | 7           |
| Weaknesses                                 | 7           |

## **Basic information about the college**

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Name of college:             | Academy of Live and Recorded Arts  |
| Type of college:             | Drama  |
| Principal:                   | Pat Trueman  |
| Address of college:          | Studio 1<br>The Royal Victoria Patriotic Building<br>Trinity Road<br>London SW18 3SX |
| Telephone number:            | 0208 870 6475  |
| Fax number:                  | 0208 875 0789  |
| Name of reporting inspector: | Tony Davis ALI   |
| Date of inspection:          | 28 February - 4 March 2005   |

## **Part A: Summary**

### **Information about the college**

The Academy of Live and Recorded Arts (ALRA), is an independent training school for actors and stage managers based in Wandsworth, South London. Formed in 1979 by the actor and director Sorrel Carson, the academy's aim is 'to reflect and nurture 21st century society through its dynamic and creative contribution to the quality of professional artists in all forms of live and recorded arts'. The academy moved to its present location at the Royal Victoria Patriotic Building in 1983 and makes use of additional accommodation at two other locations in the area. The academy offers a three-year and a one-year course in acting. Students in receipt of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) dance and drama awards (DADA) study for a professional national diploma or certificate awarded by Trinity College, London, for the three-year and one-year courses respectively. Also available, is a one-year course in stage management and technical arts for which students receive an ALRA diploma. The three-year course in acting and the stage management and technical arts course are for students aged 18 or over. The one-year acting course is for students aged 21 or over.

At the time of the inspection, there were 126 students, 113 acting students, 90 of whom are enrolled on the three-year acting course, 23 on the one-year acting course, and 13 on the stage management course. On the three-year acting course, 22 out of 32 in the first year, 18 out of 28 in the second year, and 24 out of 30 in the third year were in receipt of DADA awards. Seven of the 23 one-year acting course students were in receipt of the awards. Students on the stage management and technical arts course are not eligible for the DADA award, so this course was not inspected.

A new principal was appointed in September 2003 and a new senior manager in charge of the acting courses was appointed in September 2004. There are nine full-time management and administration staff, 15 visiting tutors and nine freelance directors. ALRA is a registered charity. The academy is managed by the principal who is accountable to a board of trustees. The senior management team consists of the principal, the course freelance directors for both acting and stage management, the theatre arts tutor/designer, and the acting courses administrator. The course director for acting is assisted by voice and movement co-ordinators. The trustees are drawn from a range of backgrounds including theatre, business and education.

### **How effective is the college?**

#### ***Key strengths***

- very high standard of performance skills
  - very good or excellent teaching
  - thorough assessment procedures
-

- good pastoral support
- good opportunity to work with industry professionals
- the professionalism and self-discipline of students
- good strategic leadership
- very good curriculum management
- effective development of the curriculum
- good use of student feedback in continuously improving provision.

***What should be improved***

- the retention rate on the 3-year acting course
- some of the teaching spaces
- the initial assessment and support for students with additional learning needs
- the recording and monitoring of development actions.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

**Students' view of the college**

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

***What students like about the college***

- approachable and friendly staff
- focus on their individual needs
- variety of teaching styles
- choice of professional freelance directors
- support and the opportunity to be listened to.

***What they feel could be improved***

- canteen facilities
  - size of some work spaces
-

- 
- number of opportunities for public third-year shows in locations more easily accessible to industry representatives
  - heating in many of the studios.

## **Part B: The Drama Course**

Inspectors judged the provision to be outstanding (**Grade 1**)

### **Strengths**

- very high standard of performance skills
- very good or excellent teaching
- thorough assessment procedures
- particularly good pastoral support
- good opportunity to work with industry professionals
- the professionalism and self-discipline of students.

### **Weaknesses**

- retention rate on three-year acting course
- some inappropriate teaching spaces.

### **Scope of provision**

1. The three-year acting course aims to provide students with vocational training leading to a career in the professional stage, screen and broadcast industries. The core subject areas are voice, acting, movement, performance, radio and acting for camera. These subjects are supplemented by acting projects which include devising from character and epic narrative in the first year and Restoration and 19th century realism in the second year. In their final year, students concentrate on professional preparation which includes business workshops, one public production each term in the academy's theatre, a television project, and the development of audition and interview skills. There is also a showcase performance at a West End theatre. There remains a narrow range of performance opportunities.

2. The one-year acting course provides training for students over the age of 21. The core subject areas include voice, acting, acting for camera, radio and movement. Students perform in one project each term, which are currently based around 19th century realism, Shakespeare and modern British theatre. Students also perform in one public show at the academy's theatre and one showcase at a West End theatre.

3. Students have the opportunity to apply to a range of organisations for additional funding, including the Henry Cotton Trust, the Foundation for the Sports and Arts, the Alec

---



---

Guinness memorial award, the Lillian Baylis award, the Sir John Gielgud award and the Laurence Olivier award.

### **Achievements and standards**

4. Applications have risen steadily over recent years and the academy received 681 applications for 56 places available in 2004. Students demonstrate a high level of core performance skills. They are enthusiastic, motivated and self-assured. In a rehearsal of a scene from 'The Winter's Tale', students were able to demonstrate a high level of ability and flexibility when performing their speech with different attitudes. In the final stages of a production of 'The Laramie Project', third-year students performed detailed and convincing characters which reflected a high level of research and creativity. In a theatre studies lesson, students demonstrated their breadth of analysis and understanding as they provided their colleagues with the results of their detailed research. They answered questions confidently and contextualised the key play texts of the period they were studying. Good reflective practice is evident in students' log books. Since September 2004, the system for monitoring student attendance has been significantly improved leading to a considerable reduction in the number of unauthorised absences. The professionalism and self-discipline of the students is very good. During the week of inspection the attendance rate was 94%.

5. Retention rates on the three-year course have been low, but have significantly improved during the last year. The retention rate for the course which finished in 2003 was 78% and 76% for the course which finished in 2004. The current retention rate for the course which finishes in 2005 is 77%. However, since the establishment of the new management team and the increase in staff's expectations of their students, only one student from the three-year acting course has left early. The current in-year retention rate is therefore 97% on the three-year course and 100% on the one-year course. The pass rate for the Trinity Diploma is 100%. Recent graduates have gained employment in television, radio, film and theatre including Dream Team, William and Mary, Dalziel & Pascoe, and productions at the Royal Court, Young Vic, National and Theatre Royal Stratford East. Many students find suitable employment, most of which is in fringe theatre, films, including student films, commercials and small parts in television. However, some graduates from the one-year course are yet to find suitable employment and the proportion of high-profile work has not sufficiently improved from the previous inspection.

### **Quality of education and training**

6. Most of the teaching is good or better and some is outstanding. In the majority of classes and rehearsals teachers produce a creative, energetic and flexible atmosphere which allows students to progress well in each subject. Students are challenged by, and responsive to, the incisive feedback they receive. In a highly effective dance class, students were highly motivated, and developed their understanding of balance, precision, rhythm, energy and musicality in a variety of dance styles and routines. The teacher provided excellent instruction and guidance and had high expectations of the students. In a voice class, the teacher's inspiring pace, energy and excellent technical knowledge enabled the students to

---

further develop their understanding of how their voices and bodies function. Their resonance, range and vocal projection noticeably improved throughout the lesson. In a weaker lesson, the teacher was not sufficiently prepared. Students were not clear about the learning objectives of the lesson, and time and resources were used inefficiently.

7. Teachers are experienced professionals in theatre and related arts, many of whom work as freelance practitioners in their specialist fields. Professional freelance directors are employed to lead projects and produce shows. Recent freelance directors have worked at the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Globe Theatre, Royal Exchange Manchester and directed a popular television series. General resources are good. The academy has ten classroom/rehearsal spaces, fully equipped radio and television studios, a dance studio with a sprung floor, a dressing room and shower facilities and two theatres. The theatres are not licensed for public performance. The main theatre will be refurbished by September 2005. There is a subsidised cafe on site, with limited opening hours. The library is well stocked. Students have access to much improved IT provision, internet access and a video and DVD viewing room. Some of the teaching rooms, however, are inappropriate for the lessons which are scheduled in them, being either too small, inappropriately configured or with insufficiently controllable temperature.

8. The academy's assessment procedures are thorough. The staff assessment board which meets each term effectively identifying the progress of individual students. Students receive very good written and verbal feedback after each project. The feedback clearly identifies students' strengths and areas for improvement and, where appropriate, provides them with strategies on how to improve. Improvement targets are set and re-evaluated at regular intervals. The acting course co-ordinator moderates all assessed work and evaluates the assessment process individually with each visiting teacher or director to ensure consistency.

9. There is a thorough and detailed programme for pre-entry advice and guidance. All applicants are auditioned using clear entry criteria, and all judgements are appropriately recorded. The academy provides prospective students with open days and the opportunity to take part in a day of practical workshops, including a tour of the academy and an opportunity to meet the staff and current students. Students felt that the audition process was thorough and supportive and met or exceeded all their expectations.

10. Pastoral care is particularly good. The staff team has worked hard to create an atmosphere of trust in which students can identify or declare sensitive areas of personal concern and receive appropriate support to help them develop and progress. A structured system of regular tutorials is in place, though students can request additional tutorials for further support at any time. Students vocal problems are identified at an early point in their course and referrals are made to remedial specialists. A confidential counselling service is available if required.

---

## Part C: Leadership and Management

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

### Strengths

- good strategic leadership
- very good curriculum management
- effective development of the curriculum
- good use of student feedback in continuously improving provision.

### Weaknesses

- underdeveloped approach to initial assessment and support for students with additional learning needs
- insufficiently systematic approach to the recording and monitoring of development actions.

11. The academy was last inspected in November 2002. In the period since the last inspection, the academy has addressed a number of the issues raised in the report and improvements have been made. These include a thorough review of the academy's strategic priorities, an increased emphasis on staff development and the dissemination of good practice, the re-introduction of an appraisal system for full-time staff, and clearer references to equal opportunities in the staff and student handbooks. The principal and acting courses co-ordinator have both been appointed since the last inspection and have made significant changes to the content and structure of the acting curriculum. Improvements have also been made to the computing facilities available to students, all of which now have internet access, and to the resources available to support students' radio and television work. The strict adherence to a new standard of professionalism expected of students has led to significant improvements in punctuality and attendance.

12. The principal's strategic leadership of the academy is good. After a period of reflection and review, the principal led on the development of a new mission statement for the academy. The previous strategic plan was effectively reviewed and a new strategy developed to align the academy with its revised mission. A significant aspect of the new strategic plan is the development of the curriculum in line with a strong philosophy for the sequential development of students' skills and understanding in both live theatre and acting for recorded media. These developments are being managed well and are effective. A thorough analysis has also been carried out to help determine the most appropriate strategy to overcome the current accommodation issues. However, there is no clear implementation plan or sufficiently clear measures of success for many of the strategic objectives. The principal is

---

---

supported well by the board of trustees. The trustees recently reviewed their membership and have recruited new members from the industry, including an actress, an agent and a casting director. Trustees use their expertise well to offer an appropriate level of challenge and guidance.

13. Curriculum management is very good. Managers and subject co-ordinators are managing the operational aspects of the provision and the development and introduction of the new curriculum well. Communications within the academy are good. While much of this is informal, all staff are aware of the academy's strategic priorities and their contribution to its operational effectiveness. An effective new meeting structure has been introduced with meetings at the end of each term to enable most of the part-time teaching staff to attend and contribute. The acting courses co-ordinator also meets regularly and formally with the subject co-ordinators and the one-year acting course tutor to discuss the operational effectiveness of the provision and the progress of individual students. The senior management team meet approximately twice each term to review strategic and curriculum developments and significant operational or student-related issues. However, few meetings have been formally recorded. There is insufficient identification of specific actions required and no subsequent record of progress. Job descriptions are in place for full-time staff. The handbooks for students and staff are good. It clearly sets out the mission and aims of the academy and contain course outlines, an overview of course documentation and assessment procedures, guidelines for writing assessment profiles, and disciplinary, appeals and complaints procedures. An affective appraisal system has been re-introduced and most full-time staff have now been appraised. There are plans to appraise the work of more core part-time teachers, one of which has now been carried out. There is no formal system for providing staff with feedback on the quality of their teaching. The academy has a staff development policy and staff have access to further training and development opportunities identified through appraisal or the course of their work. One member of staff has recently completed a teaching certificate and three more are due to start in April 2005. Staff who have undertaken specific development work effectively share what they have learnt with their colleagues.

14. The academy has an underdeveloped approach to initial assessment and support for students with additional learning needs. Students are actively encouraged to declare any known support issues. Teachers are issued with a useful checklist to help identify students who may have additional support needs. However, students are not sufficiently assessed at the beginning of their course and some support issues have only been identified following poor on-course performance. The academy does not currently have a member of staff qualified to support students with their literacy development needs.

15. Through self-assessment and on-going review, the quality of the provision is being systematically improved. In November 2004, the principal and the senior management team produced their current self-assessment report which evaluates the provision against the Common Inspection Framework. It identifies in detail the strengths of the organisation and areas for improvement, though inspectors identified some additional weaknesses. Improvements have included: the standardisation of assessment reporting and the provision of timely and regular feedback to students; the introduction of individual assessment review

---

---

meetings between the acting courses co-ordinator and each project director; the improvement of resources; the development of the attendance monitoring system which have led to significant improvements in students' attendance. However, individual responsibilities and monitoring arrangements have not been highlighted in the current development plan.

16. The academy has a well-established and thorough system for the collection of student feedback. A representative from each student group guides his/her colleagues through an extremely thorough review and evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the subjects and projects they have studied that term. The student representatives then meet collectively as a course-evaluation panel with the acting courses co-ordinator and the course administrator. Detailed formal notes are recorded on the performance of all tutors and their projects/lessons. These notes are circulated to the senior managers and subject co-ordinators to inform developments for the forthcoming term. Examples of improvements include changes to the quantity of time given to each subject and better management of the quantity and scheduling of research and home work. The feedback also provides managers with valuable information on how teachers can improve their effectiveness and, in some cases, whether a visiting teacher or director should be used again.

17. The academy has detailed policies and procedures for equality of opportunity, health and safety, grievance and appeals. While the full equal opportunities policy is not in the staff and student handbook, there are statements contained in the charter, the rules and regulations and the casting policy sections which indicate the academy's commitment to equality for all. The handbook contains useful information for students on the courses, college life, student welfare, accommodation and finance. The academy is actively developing the provision of actor training for students with disabilities. In a current collaborative project with a theatre training provider who specialises in training for students with disabilities, the academy is providing a specialist tutor and resources for a short course in audio and radio acting skills. Following this course, the same students will benefit from a short course in acting for camera. In 2002, the academy ran a successful course for deaf students who wanted to develop their acting skills. Building on the success of this project, the academy will be running a similar course throughout this coming summer. The academy is yet to produce a statement and an implementation plan in response to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2000. However, it has recently had a washroom altered to accommodate the needs of wheelchair users and is shortly due to refurbish its main theatre which will include improved access for those with restricted mobility. Much of the academy's premises will continue to have poor access for those with restricted mobility.

18. The academy manages its resources efficiently. Management accounts are produced for each month of the academic year by the finance manager. These are monitored by the principal and the finance sub-committee of the board of trustees and by the whole board of trustees at their quarterly meetings. Annual budgets are prepared against planned income and expenditure. The principal and the finance manager set the annual budget after consideration of the strategic objectives and in consultation with the finance sub-committee of the board of trustees. The budget is formally approved by the board of trustees. The course director for stage management then sets production budgets for each performance project in line with the overall annual budget. Expenditure against budgets is monitored closely by the finance

---

---

manager and discussed every two weeks with the course director for stage management. There is a contingency fund for repairs and renewals. Annual accounts are prepared by the finance manager, the principal and the finance sub-committee of the board of trustees. These are approved by the whole board of trustees and are subject to an annual external audit. The academy seeks to secure value for money when purchasing capital equipment.

---

**Notes**