

Bird College

Inspection of colleges in the Dance and Drama Awards

Inspection report

Provider reference	50701
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Main Findings

Course:	Three-year National Diploma in Professional Music Theatre
Overall effectiveness:	Outstanding (grade 1)
Date of inspection:	21 November 2007

This feedback contains findings from the inspection visit. It draws on the evidence available from performance data, external and internal reviews, other available documentation and interviews held on the day.

The musical theatre course was previously inspected by Ofsted in June 2002 when it was graded outstanding (grade 1) for achievement and standards and the quality of education and training. The leadership and management of the college were last inspected in May 2004 and were graded outstanding (grade 1).

Achievement and standards

Recent reports produced by Trinity College London show that the standard of dancing, singing and acting in classes and performances continues to be very high. The recent revalidation report judged that 'extremely high standards characterise the ethos of the institution... with several outstanding students in every cohort...' A Trinity assessor's report on a performance by third year students in the summer of 2007 noted that 'the students showed great skill, not just in singing, acting and dancing but were also accomplished gymnasts and showed a mature sense of comic timing.' Diploma success rates are good. Some 90% of those enrolling in 2004 completed the three year course and all of those successfully gained a National Diploma in Professional Music Theatre.

Bird graduates are in regular employment and make very good progress within the industry. Students secure employment quickly; at the time of the inspection, 75% of 2007 graduates were already in work. Typically, former students will find themselves in cruise ships, national and international touring companies or West End productions. For example, past students have appeared in the West End shows *Miss Saigon*, *Chicago* and *Starlight Express* either as ensemble performers or in leading roles. Prepared especially well in ballet, Bird graduates have also been soloists in the world tours of the Royal Ballet, Scottish Ballet and the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Quality of provision

The quality of training is high. For Trinity, the highly professional and polished work seen by assessors reflects training characterised by 'a careful and extremely well taught balance of technical and performance skills'. Students speak very highly of the quality of teaching. Teachers are skilled and experienced professionals. Three quarters of both full and part time teachers also have a teaching qualification or are working to achieve one. The assessment process is very thorough. According to Trinity, 'the college meticulously grades both technical and performance skills'. Students say they are clear about their level of progress in each subject and of what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum is well-balanced and has recently been modified to serve more precisely the needs of students who are requiring an increasingly diverse range of specialist skills to be assured of access to the best employment. There are additional classes for those who need them and the timetable is flexible enough to allow students access to extra sessions when necessary.

The audition process is extremely thorough. All applicants are auditioned by a panel of experienced full time staff. Once they have enrolled, students report that the pastoral support they receive is outstanding. They feel confident of being able to approach any member of staff if they feel they are in need of particular support. Students also find the very well produced student handbook informative and helpful. Injury care is excellent. Injuries are carefully recorded and information about them circulated to teachers every day. While students receive regular feedback from subject teachers, there are too few opportunities for students' overall progress to be regularly monitored and reviewed. Third year students say they are well prepared for entry to employment and the college is introducing classes run on the lines of professional auditions. The college agency is a strength, supporting the one third or so of students who leave without agents, into work.

Leadership and management

The college is well led and managed by the principal and her executive team and college staff speak highly of the many improvements to systems and communications that have been effected since the last inspection. There is a clear structure of boards and management groups which serve the work of the college effectively and lines of accountability are clear. Meetings are conscientiously minuted, although action points are not always recorded. The college is very good at seeking the views of students and responding to them; students sit on a number of college boards. There are appropriate policies in place for equal opportunities, health and safety and disability.

The quality assurance process for the diploma course remains underdeveloped and there is too much reliance on external monitoring. The purpose of the self assessment report is not yet fully understood, and there is insufficient analysis of evidence such as destination data and teaching quality for the college to make accurate judgements about the performance of the course. With the help of its agency, the college is making determined, and largely successful, efforts to track the employment of past students. Teachers are better qualified than at the past inspection and the good support given to teachers for their professional development is much valued. Accommodation has also improved and the college's successful bid for the former Bexley Academy has increased the amount of studio space available for training.

Points for action

The college must:

- ensure that the quality assurance process for the diploma course is based upon a rigorous process of self assessment at course and subject level.

Points for consideration

The college might usefully:

- develop the role of the tutor so that students' overall progress can be monitored and reviewed more frequently.

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