

Performers College

Inspection of colleges in the Dance and Drama Awards

Inspection report

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Main findings

Course: Three-year Performers' Course

Overall effectiveness: Outstanding (grade 1)

Date of inspection: 14 October 2008

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 performers' course was previously inspected by Ofsted in May 2005 when it was graded outstanding (grade 1) for achievement and standards and the quality of education and training. At the same time, the leadership and management of the college were graded good (grade 2).

Standards

Recent reports produced by Trinity College London show that the college is maintaining high standards of attainment and performance. In its September 2007 revalidation report, Trinity noted that nearly all the reports of its assessors were very positive. Several reports highlighted students of outstanding ability and included comments such as: 'a performance with great integrity', 'very high calibre of student', 'energy, humour and wit'. In 2008, Trinity assessors praised, among other things, the commitment shown by students in performance, their good stagecraft and the beauty of their presentations. Commenting on a third year musical theatre presentation, one assessor wrote: 'The work was of a very high standard and in some cases exceptionally good and way beyond what is expected of graduating students'.

Figures made available by the college suggest that the annual retention rate varies between 80% and 85%, which is similar to that at the time of the last inspection. Only one completing student has ever failed to gain the Trinity diploma.

Students are hard working and committed. The college is presently overhauling its registration system and overall attendance figures were not available. A monitoring report produced by the Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET) in March 2008 described the students as 'always polite, enthusiastic, disciplined and focused.' When interviewed, students displayed confidence, enthusiasm and a keen commitment to the values of the college.

It seems that about 80% of graduates have work within a year of leaving, although records are not complete. About 75% of students have agents by the end of their graduating year. Most initially find employment in cruise lines, touring companies or in the commercial field. Some subsequently gain West End contracts, and the college claims this proportion has increased since the last inspection.

Employment destinations of students graduating in 2005 include *Mama Mia* and *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* in the West End, a touring production of *The Producers* in the USA and *Snow White* at Disneyland Paris.

Quality of provision

Trinity judges Performers College to be a very good provider of the National Diplomas in Dance and Musical Theatre. 'The course is current and meets students' needs, assessment is clear and rigorous. The college continues to be committed to improvement and performance standards are high.'

In 2005, inspectors saw very good and outstanding teaching. Recent student evaluations are highly positive. Students value both the recent and relevant experience of their teachers and the skill with which they teach. They believe they are stretched as performers and that their preparation for the industry is excellent. Teachers know their students well and are able to target challenges carefully. Students particularly appreciate the quality of the cover arrangements when a regular teacher is unavailable. Although a process of class observation is in place, the college does not yet have sufficient data to provide an overall judgement about the quality of teaching or analysis of its features. Some teachers have teaching qualifications and the college supports those who wish to acquire certification in post compulsory education and training.

There is a comprehensive and finely tuned process of assessment. In 2008, CDET's attached course monitor described assessment arrangements as 'very stringent and challenging for the students'. Trinity assessors noted assessments which were 'simple and clear...'. Students are formally assessed in the spring term of each year, but they have one-to-one sessions with each of their subject teachers every term. Self-evaluation plays a key part in the assessment process. Students say how approachable and supportive their teachers are and how they are always clear how they are getting on and what they need to do to improve.

The overall balance of the curriculum on both dance and musical theatre routes is good and students appreciate the opportunities they have to excel in many different disciplines. Opportunities to study contemporary dance have expanded since the last inspection and a choreography module has been introduced in response to a recommendation in the 2007 Trinity revalidation report. Weaknesses in the acting provision noted in the last inspection have been addressed largely through changes in staff. The curriculum is responsive to feedback from staff and students and changes have been made as a result. Students' individual training needs are catered for as far as possible, often through a range of optional classes, for example in ballet and singing. There are good performance opportunities, both in the college and in a local theatre.

Teachers are experienced professionals in theatre and media and many work as freelance practitioners in their specialist fields. Carefully chosen visiting directors, performers and choreographers complement the work of class teachers and their input is much valued by students. Its purpose built accommodation continues to serve the college well. Studios, offices and circulation spaces are of a high quality. The college knows that the female students' dressing room is too small and that

money needs to be spent on learning resources and information and communication technology (ICT) facilities in the library.

The care and guidance of students are outstanding. In 2008, the CDET praised the directors and staff for being consistently 'caring and encouraging to their students'. Managers and teachers have established 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. The college has a strong physiotherapy programme and good support for students with dyslexia. Procedures for injury prevention and rehabilitation are very good and injury rates have dropped significantly since the last inspection. Students' progress through the college is carefully supported; every student has a termly meeting with a senior member of staff where individual targets are set and monitored.

Support into employment is very good. Agents come to the college to run mock auditions and attend the summer shows. The college's own agency is beginning to have an effect and students benefit enormously from the contacts within the industry of the agency, directors and teachers. As many as 50% of third year students get work experience in professional pantomime at Christmas, some in leading roles.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the college have improved significantly since the last inspection and are now a significant strength. Staff praise the approachability, fairness and organisational skills of the four directors. The 'family' feel of the college to which staff and students consistently refer is inspired by the directors and supported by very effective operational management. Communications are excellent and a clear but simple management structure ensures the college runs smoothly.

A well-judged process of staff appraisal is in place. In addition to their appraisal observations, teachers are observed termly by co-ordinators. There are good examples of staff training being informed by the appraisal process: identified as an area for development by a number of staff, for example, the college organised some training on the teaching of breathing in performance.

Improvement is supported by a healthy emphasis on discussion and an openness to ideas and the college makes very good use of feedback from staff and students. For example, the directors are themselves appraised by staff. Judgements about the strengths and weaknesses of the college are perceptive and accurate and well supported by evidence. Although it would benefit from being more closely linked to other aspects of the quality assurance process, the self-assessment report is not afraid to identify areas for development, and there is plentiful evidence of changes being made as a result of internal and external feedback. Particularly impressive are attempts being made by the course leader to establish the value added to students' skills and understanding by their training. The recording and analysis of graduate destinations remain incomplete and it is likely that present records are not giving the college a fair picture of its students' achievements.

Very few black or minority ethnic students are enrolled and the college knows that it has to work harder to improve the balance of its intake.

Points for consideration

The college might usefully:

- continue efforts to recruit more students from minority ethnic backgrounds
- further develop the collection and collation of employment information
- improve the library and ICT resources.