

WAC Arts

Dance and drama college

Inspection dates

9–10 March 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have made excellent progress in dealing successfully with all areas for improvement from the previous inspection.
- Leaders and trustees have maintained a clear focus on the college mission to widen participation in learning and broaden entry to careers in performing arts for under-represented groups.
- Learners, often from highly disadvantaged backgrounds and from groups under-represented in performing arts, make rapid and sustained progress.
- Learners benefit from high-quality teaching and learning in imaginatively planned and well-managed classes.
- Trustees provide outstanding levels of relevant expertise, challenge and support to leaders and managers.
- Learners are supported exceptionally well by skilled and experienced staff.
- Learners achieve well, and develop a broad range of professional performance and personal skills during training.
- Learners' destinations are excellent, with all graduates gaining employment in the industry during the past three years.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Low numbers, particularly of male learners, mean that a minority of classes are small, and learners do not always benefit from a sufficiently rich learning experience.
- Staff members lack a developed awareness of their duties under the 'Prevent' agenda, and learners are insufficiently aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Too few teachers are permanent and/or full time, and on a minority of occasions this means that learners do not experience continuity in learning.

Full report

Information about the provider

WAC Arts is a charity and company limited by guarantee. The college provides a range of arts and media classes for learners aged five and upwards at weekends and in the evenings, as well as on longer qualification-based programmes. The college is based in Hampstead Town Hall, north London, and attracts learners nationally and internationally to its three-year diploma course in musical theatre, awarded by Trinity College, London.

There are currently 17 learners enrolled on the diploma course. The diploma course was last inspected in 2011, when provision was graded satisfactory.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the numbers of learners on each year of the course, particularly male learners.
- Consider ways to provide greater continuity in staffing through the employment of greater numbers of full-time teachers.
- Raise awareness among staff of their duties under the 'Prevent' legislation, and develop learners' understanding of the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and managers, together with trustees, have focused relentlessly on areas for improvement from the previous inspection. During the past four years, managers have dealt successfully with all areas for improvement and recommendations from the previous inspection report. Leaders have also brought about improvements in other areas of provision, for example in broadening the curriculum, and maintained a close focus on enhancing learners' skills and experiences throughout the period since the previous inspection.
- Leaders, staff and trustees maintain an unrelenting focus on the college's core mission to widen participation and broaden entry to careers in performing arts for traditionally under-represented groups. Despite the financial pressures on the college in the past, leaders have maintained an unwavering focus on recognising and nurturing potential and talent in learners who may lack formal qualifications or prior training in dance, singing and acting. The college offers a vibrant and welcoming environment for learners who would otherwise be excluded from higher-level study.
- Staff are very well qualified, and exceptionally well experienced as performing arts practitioners. They bring high levels of industry focus to the course, and they encourage and inspire learners with their skilled teaching. However, too few members of the teaching staff are permanent or full time, and this means that learners cannot always experience sustained levels of stability and continuity in learning and support.
- Measures to ensure the quality of teaching and learning are good. A well-regarded and reliable system of teaching and learning observations provides managers with a clear understanding of classroom standards. Teachers value the observations, from which they derive considerable good-development opportunities.
- Leaders, trustees and staff maintain excellent industry links, and ensure that these are used to provide a good range of benefits for learners. As a result, learners' skills development and progress are rapid and sustained, and learners' destinations are excellent.

The governance of the provider

- Governance arrangements are exceptionally effective in providing leaders with challenge and support to improve provision for learners' benefit. Trustees bring an outstanding range of skills and experiences to their roles, and apply these to excellent effect.
- Trustees focus well on strategic direction and on actions for improvement, but take a close interest in learners' performance and academic work. During a period of financial strictures and reduced income from loss of DaDA funding in 2012, trustees have supported leaders well to focus on the quality of teaching and learning and on maintaining the college's mission to improve opportunities for those under-represented in the industry.
- Leaders keep trustees well informed about the college's performance and standards and receive good levels of challenge and enquiry from trustees. Trustees know staff and learners very well, and understand the demanding nature of the industry.

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Staff and governors receive suitably frequent safeguarding and health and safety training. Staff and trustees understand their responsibilities under current legislation and work hard to provide a safe, harmonious and respectful culture at the college. Teachers have a well-developed understanding of the need to train and work safely, and they instil this in learners.
- Managers ensure that all staff undergo employment and vetting and barring checks before they begin teaching. Visiting practitioners and occasional sessional teachers are accompanied when they teach.
- Suitable measures are in place to safeguard learners who are under 18 years of age, and teachers and managers provide very good levels of support for 'looked after' learners who are in the care of their local authority.
- Managers have received training in response to 'Prevent' legislation, but staff and learners have not yet received formal training in this area. Managers recognise this as an area for action in coming months.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers have high expectations for behaviour and standards of work; learners work diligently to meet these. All learners have a good understanding of the demands of the industry and the amount of work that is required of them. Teachers continually challenge their learners through demanding and imaginatively planned and developed activities and assignments. In classes, teachers are careful to check that learning is consolidated, and that all learners have developed the required skills and techniques to a good level before moving on to new skills or topics. Learners work hard, acquire good and sometimes outstanding subject knowledge and vocational skills, and make consistently good progress from their starting points. Teachers make effective use of initial assessment to gauge individual levels of ability and skill among new and prospective learners.
- Low learner numbers, and particularly the small numbers of male learners, impose some restrictions on the range of activities in a small minority of classes. Currently, year groups are combined for a number of classes in order to make viable teaching groups. Nevertheless, teachers are adept at devising targets commensurate with the experience and abilities of their learners. For example, in a jazz dance lesson, each year group had to perform the same choreographed routine although the more experienced learners had to perform it to music of a faster and more complex tempo.
- Written and oral assessment is thorough and demanding. Teachers focus well on improving learners' English skills in all written submissions. Managers and teachers provide very good support and small group tuition for the small number of learners who do not have GCSE C-grade passes in English and/or mathematics to gain these qualifications. All learners improve their work and make further progress as a result of detailed and constructive marking by teachers. In nearly all cases, learners who are injured or otherwise unable to take part in lessons have clear tasks to complete and are appropriately and productively involved in the classes.
- Learners develop good study skills and are always well prepared for their lessons. Where appropriate they use mobile technology effectively. Teachers are vigilant in warning of the dangers of plagiarism and in challenging learners to produce original work.
- All the teachers are current practitioners, many at a high level of professional involvement. Their experience and knowledge of the industry inspires learners. Through the expertise of teachers, excellent contacts are made with the industry, enabling learners to have rich and meaningful work placements. Learners are strongly recommended to broaden their skills and experience while on the course by volunteering to work on other WAC programmes; most do so. Learners gain very useful experience and additional qualifications by assisting teachers, by working with children's groups and schools, and by working with vulnerable young adults.
- Support for learners is exceptionally good. The college industry advisory panel provides learners with a very strong range of contacts and a good breadth of experience from its diverse membership. Final-year learners are allocated to an industry practitioner who mentors their progress and counsels constructively and realistically on what each learner's next step should be. These practitioners are assiduous in seeing their mentees in showcase performances so that their advice can be based on a realistic analysis of performance skills.
- Teachers celebrate and promote diversity exceptionally well through teaching and learning. Learners have a rich experience of exploring other cultures and ethnicities, and non-Western forms of dance and movement, for example in the exploration and performance of African music and dance.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Learners are committed, and value highly the opportunities offered by the college. They rise successfully to the challenge to see themselves from the outset as artists, trainee professionals and members of a 'play-as-cast' company, and they behave accordingly. They observe good standards regarding professional attire and in lessons they are focused and on-task. All learners have a mature understanding that good preparation for lessons is essential if they are to benefit fully from training.
- Attendance and punctuality are good. Learners are aware of their responsibilities regarding collaborative learning and rehearsals, and they understand that these reflect the exacting demands of the profession. They are respectful and courteous towards each other and especially towards their teachers. The rich and diverse backgrounds of peers and teachers enrich their lives.

- Teachers are insistent that learners extend their skills to broaden their opportunities for employment. Teachers frequently and constructively refer to, and take examples from, their own experiences to prepare learners for the demands of the industry. For example, in voice lessons, learners experiment with different vocal registers as if they were employed to do cartoon voice-over work. In singing lessons, learners are encouraged to attempt to write their own songs as a possible option when performance work is not available. The curriculum is particularly broad and provides learners with skills beyond those available in many dance-training institutions, for example in African dance and in aerial work.
- Learners feel valued and cared for and feel that they are learning and training within a caring, supportive and safe environment. They recognise their responsibility to remain fit and healthy. They keep diet logs to monitor nutritional values and constantly rehydrate in lessons. Staff provide outstanding support for those with injuries through expert diagnosis and rehabilitation treatments.
- Learners are able to use specialist vocational vocabulary with assurance. They are aware of the skills they need to gain employment in their chosen sector of the industry and work hard in attaining the required standard.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Learners make outstanding progress from their starting points. Leaders and teachers focus strongly on promoting and protecting the individuality of learners and the diversity of the learner body. Staff work very successfully to recognise and develop potential in learners who may not have a strong, formal background in dance, acting or singing, and who often may have come from backgrounds of considerable hardship or from ethnic and social groups under-represented in the industry. As a result, learners become strongly self-reliant, highly focused and very well prepared to take on challenging and demanding work. They present employers with well-honed and distinctive skills, which are valued highly.
- Success rates for learners are good, and all learners who complete the course achieve the Trinity diploma. Learners who withdraw during the first year of the course generally do so for financial reasons. Across the past four years, all learners who entered year two completed the course. Managers monitor withdrawals closely and make very significant efforts to support and retain learners wherever possible.
- Managers have made significant improvements to the range and reliability of information gathered about the progression of learners into employment. Leaders and governors now have detailed data about the rates at which learners gain representation from theatrical agents, the rates at which they achieve relevant sustained employment, and the types of work undertaken by learners across the past four years. Managers use this information well to review the effectiveness of provision and to prepare learners fully for employment.
- All completing learners since 2012 have obtained professional work in the industry within six months of graduation, and a high and increasing proportion of learners each year gain agency representation either during the course or within three months of graduation. Learners achieve high-quality work with innovative directors, choreographers and dance companies, in West End and repertory theatre, in television and film, and a small proportion in the recording industry. Around a fifth of learners from recent cohorts have gone on to achieve a top-up BA honours qualification at a partner university.
- Learners develop excellent personal and social skills during the course. They behave professionally from an early stage, are strongly supportive of one another and model the college ethos of tolerance, respect, and celebration of difference.

Provider details

Type of provider	Dance and drama college
Age range of learners	16-18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	25
Principal/CEO	Celia Greenwood
Website address	www.wacarts.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)							17	
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Funding received from								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Richard Beynon, lead inspector

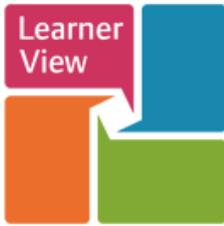
Chris Young

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the chief executive officer, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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