

Academy of Live and Recorded Arts

Dance and drama school

Inspection dates

21–22 January 2019

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

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Managers successfully implement excellent strategies to recruit, engage and support students of all backgrounds and to promote a diverse culture across the institution.
- Governors are highly effective at supporting leaders and managers to achieve their challenging corporate aims and use their industry connections to maximise learners' exposure to possible employment.
- Teachers are well qualified and highly experienced serving practitioners in the performing arts industry. They use their expertise skilfully to enthuse and motivate learners.
- Staff benefit from access to a wide range of personal and professional development activities which enhance their skills.
- Teachers plan and structure lessons very creatively and, as a result, students develop the skills necessary for meaningful and committed performance work.
- Students are highly motivated, confident and self-assured, and recognise the importance of dedication and commitment if they wish to achieve success in the industry.
- Teachers select scripts and performance work that helps promote students' very mature understanding of equality, diversity and life in modern Britain.
- Teachers offer an extensive range of activities to support and promote students' physical and emotional well-being so that they can develop the stamina and resilience they need to succeed on the programme.
- Students make very good progress and develop a broad cross-section of valuable performance skills which prepare them well for work in theatre, film, television and radio.
- On completion of their course, the proportion of students who successfully acquire an agent is high and, subsequently, many students successfully gain a range of professional engagements.
- At both the Wandsworth and Wigan campuses, much of the accommodation is in a comparatively poor decorative state.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Academy of Live and Recorded Arts (ALRA) is a private performing arts organisation that trains students for employment in the performing arts industries. ALRA has two sites: ALRA South in Wandsworth, South London, and ALRA North in Wigan. ALRA specialises in preparing students for employment in live theatre, film, television and radio, and recruits students from across the country.
- At the time of the inspection, there were 193 students on acting courses at ALRA, of whom 43 were in receipt of Dance and Drama Award (DaDA) funding. For students in receipt of DaDA funding, ALRA offers a three-year acting diploma at level 6 and a 15-month acting diploma at level 5. Both qualifications are awarded by Trinity College, London.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should invest in improving the decorative state of classrooms.
- Teachers should ensure that they always provide specific learning targets for each student, and provide sufficiently challenging activities to maximise the progress of all students.
- Ensure that students are more aware of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders and managers have a clear sense of purpose for the organisation. They focus strongly and successfully on achieving the corporate aims: to equip students with the skills essential to a productive and creative life in the performance industries.
- Managers have excellent strategies in place to engage and support students of all backgrounds, increase participation from under-represented groups and promote a diverse culture. They also have initiatives to support former children looked after and others who might face disadvantage. For example, teachers run outreach workshops and auditions in partnership with external agencies, which successfully attract potential students from deprived neighbourhoods. They run a mentoring programme for students from minority ethnic backgrounds to help prepare them fully for work in the industry. Teachers also support students who are considering, or are in the process of gender reassignment to maximise their chances of progressing successfully into the world of work.
- Quality assurance procedures are good. Managers utilise the network of course reviews and quality assurance committee meetings to identify the relative strengths and areas for improvement across the institution and take action to address them. Leaders and managers have successfully tackled most weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.
- Managers use appraisal and the observation of teaching and learning effectively to evaluate the work of individual teachers and to identify areas for their professional development. Staff have excellent opportunities to take part in personal and professional development. For example, staff have all completed a fellowship with a relevant organisation to ensure that they have suitable qualifications and expertise to deliver education and training in a higher education setting. All teaching staff have also received training in mental health first aid. Several teachers are taking, or have completed, postgraduate or doctoral programmes relevant to the skills and disciplines they teach.
- Leaders and trustees have recently acquired additional spaces at both campuses to increase resources available to teach television and radio skills. At both the Wandsworth and Wigan campuses, much of the accommodation is in a comparatively poor decorative state.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is highly effective. Trustees play a key role in shaping the strategic and educational focus of the institution, as well as overseeing safeguarding and financial control. Since the previous inspection, leaders have recruited additional trustees. The board has a suitable skill set, incorporating former students, performers and a casting agent, as well as trustees with expertise in the fields of education, legal and financial services.
- Leaders use the trustees particularly effectively to develop and maintain links with the industry. For example, the casting director uses her contacts and influence to increase the number of agents who attend the student showcases.

Safeguarding

- ALRA has effective safeguarding processes and procedures in place. Students feel safe and know who to turn to for support if they have any concerns. Students study a rich array of themes through their practical work associated with safeguarding. For example, a group of students producing performance work around hostage-taking and terrorism had the opportunity to hear first-hand from John McCarthy about his experiences as a hostage in Lebanon.
- Staff explore with students the risks of sexual exploitation in the performing arts industry. This raises their awareness of safeguarding risks in the sector and helps prepare them to work in the industry. Staff correctly acknowledge that they have not done enough with students to raise their awareness of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching staff are highly experienced and well qualified in their specialist fields, such as movement, speech and acting. They have worked extensively as serving practitioners in the performing arts industry and demonstrate excellent subject knowledge. They enthusiastically share that professional insight and expertise with students.
- Teachers employ a diverse range of teaching and learning techniques creatively and effectively. They plan and structure their lessons well. At all times, teachers model the high professional standards and expectations of the industry to which students should aspire. Their example engages and motivates students to learn and, as a result, they make very good progress.
- Teachers encourage students to work collaboratively together throughout all performance activities. This results in meaningful and committed performance work, using well-developed acting, voice, movement and musical techniques. For example, in movement lessons, teachers skilfully use a range of playful interactions which help students become more aware of detailed physical qualities in the body.
- Students make particularly good progress in lessons. For example, in a vocal techniques lesson, students quickly identified and articulated vocal issues such as tongue tensions, breath work and vocal strain, to pinpoint and overcome barriers to their development.
- Teachers are adept at ensuring that learners remain highly motivated. Teachers encourage students to build their confidence, fluency and performance skills by working with increasingly complex, contrasting and unknown genres of theatre, such as period repertoire, drag, cabaret and contemporary theatre. For example, teachers used scripts which enabled students to explore comedic qualities of timing, communication and complicity between characters. Students explored how to take risks as performers and extended their understanding of comedy.
- Students maintain detailed reflective journals. This ensures that they analyse what new knowledge and skills they acquire as the course progresses, and helps foster a culture of self-improvement. Teachers' insightful observations and comments provide comprehensive information and advice to students to identify their strengths and areas for further development. These strategies give students the skills they need as reflective

practitioners to continue developing their expertise once they have completed their course.

- Teachers select work that promotes students' understanding of equality and diversity particularly well. For example, through practical activities in lessons, students explore issues that impact on young people in modern British society, including feminism, sexuality, gender and family relationships.
- Occasionally, teachers provide broad, generalised targets to all students and do not differentiate sufficiently the expectations they have of each student. As a result, the activities do not always provide enough challenge, particularly to the most able students.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Students are highly motivated, confident and self-assured, both in lessons and around ALRA. They recognise the importance of dedication and commitment if they wish to achieve success in the industry.
- Students enjoy excellent relationships with their teachers and peers. They demonstrate tolerance and respect for each other and for staff.
- Teachers run an extensive range of activities to support and promote students' physical well-being. Teachers emphasise to students the importance of becoming a healthy performer during movement and vocal technique lessons. These activities help students develop strength, flexibility and stamina. Students also attend a range of sessions, such as 'body lab', yoga, Feldenkrais method and Alexander technique workshops. These help to improve performance quality and prepare students well for the rigours of the industry.
- In recent years, leaders and managers have increased the emphasis on strategies to support students' mental and emotional well-being. Staff have received training in mental health first aid. Several staff have received training as wellbeing practitioners, and others are taking professional counselling courses. This training enables staff to identify and address students' personal and emotional concerns promptly. As a result, staff have helped students to develop their emotional resilience, and the proportion of students who fail to complete their courses has significantly reduced.
- In lessons, teachers actively encourage students to experiment in a creative and supportive environment. This approach helps students feel safe when they explore character development. As a result, students grow in confidence and are able express the emotion required to perform increasingly powerful theatre.
- Students benefit from skilful promotion of equality and diversity in lessons. They fully understand the principles behind gender-free and colour-blind casting. Teachers create extensive opportunities for students to explore topics such as feminism, coming of age and social class as a core component of the course.
- Students have an extensive array of opportunities to take part in valuable community and citizenship projects. For example, a group of students worked with a local community group for older people to engage and entertain them through drama-based activities.
- Students benefit from high-quality careers advice and guidance, which helps prepare them particularly well for when they complete their course. For example, teachers provide audition masterclasses and advice on how to acquire agency representation. Teachers

also create videos of top tips, common mistakes and job-search skills. Visiting experts give advice on themes such as self-employment, web design and basic accounting. On completion of their diploma, alumni continue to have access to support from staff in the form of advice and guidance and to rehearsal space at the institution.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- Students make excellent progress and develop a broad cross-section of valuable performance skills which prepare them thoroughly for work in live theatre, film, television and radio. Students work conscientiously in lessons and produce both written and practical work to a very high standard. The quality of performance work is particularly high.
- The proportion of students who successfully achieve their Trinity diploma has increased in recent years and is high. The vast majority of students on the three-year level 6 programme achieve high grades in the degree qualification they take alongside their diploma.
- Staff and trustees have worked hard to increase the proportion of agents who attend student showcases. As a result, on completion of their courses, the proportion of students who successfully acquire an agent has risen significantly and is high. Fewer students based in the North acquire agents compared to those in London, primarily reflecting the London-centric nature of performance work.
- On completion of their training, a high proportion of students successfully gain a range of professional engagements. Of those who achieve such engagements, a few are high-profile commissions. For example, recent graduates have obtained lead roles with national touring theatre companies and the Royal National Theatre, and television contracts on prime-time television programmes.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50308
Type of provider	Dance and drama school
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	190
Principal/CEO	Professor Adrian Hall
Telephone number	020 8870 6475
Website	www.alra.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	190
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, 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, and online questionnaires to gather the views of students 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.

Inspection team

Peter Nelson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christina Christou	Ofsted Inspector
Christopher Young	Ofsted Inspector

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