



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Court Theatre Training Company Ltd, November 2018

Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Court Theatre Training Company (CTTC) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the November 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 The Court Theatre Training Company continues to offer the two-year accelerated BA (Hons) in Acting validated by Buckinghamshire New University (the University). Student recruitment has remained stable and, at the time of the annual monitoring visit, there were 41 students on the programme; 19 who commenced their first year in September 2018 and 22 in their second year - due to complete in July 2019. Since the 2017 review, there have been minor changes in staffing; partly in response to recommendations from the external examiner and the University Partnership Tutor and partly due to some teaching staff leaving to do other professional theatre work. The programme continues to be supported by a small number of core staff. The Principal and the Administrator are full-time members of staff. Two other staff are full-time employees (the Marketing Manager and the Enhancement Officer), but their time is split between the Court Theatre Training Company and the Courtyard Theatre. Other permanent members of staff include the Director of Studies and Assistant Director of Studies, who head up a teaching team of freelance specialists. During the 2017-18 academic year, a new singing tutor was introduced. New, award-winning, external directors were also invited for the production modules.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 CTTC has made commendable progress against the review action plan, incorporating further actions to develop, implement and monitor, its own action plan (paragraph 8). The three elements of good practice identified in the 2017 review have been built upon (paragraph 4) and the three recommendations acted on and achieved (paragraphs 5-7). Admissions processes are robust (paragraph 9) and assessment practices are fair and thorough (paragraphs 10-12).

4 The 'buddy system' - whereby second-year students support first-year students - has been enhanced by starting it once a place is offered, including social media and email contact. Students confirm the benefits of this process in allowing them to prepare for and settle into the new environment and begin their studies with confidence. The range of professional experience and currency of staff, coupled with a working theatre environment, continue to develop industry competencies. CTTC has increased its use of professional directors and specialist teaching staff and secured a new patron. Destination data show graduates to be successful in entering employment or self-employment.

5 The recommendation relating to the complaints process has been fully addressed with comprehensive new procedures, a flowchart and complaints form published

electronically and in document form. Examples of the implementation given by staff illustrated the effectiveness of the procedure which is clearly understood by students.

6 The recommendation to clarify the role of the non-assessed modules is also fully met with a clear explanation of their benefits and contribution to the curriculum given on the website, in the programme handbook and during induction. Students recognise the positive benefits of these modules which enhance skills and abilities to further their employment potential.

7 The module and course evaluation processes have been strengthened as recommended, with thorough data gathering and analysis of student opinion feeding into the annual monitoring process and action planning. Module evaluations inform module assessment modifications following awarding body procedures. The Academic and Quality Committee, Management Committee and the Staff and Student Committee, contribute effectively to the programme review process. Annual monitoring processes of the awarding body provide confirmation of effective internal review. The formal Staff and Student Committee meets three times a year, but students are able to express their opinions, identify issues and see improvements at any time. An effective system of student representation through elected and trained student representatives (called company managers) articulates student opinion and provides a useful experience for fulfilling the role of a company manager in subsequent employment. Students provided examples such as changes to the physical learning environment of how their views had been acted on promptly and effectively.

8 The Company has extended the review action plan to include its own priorities for quality improvement and enhancement. Priorities include improving mental health support and academic writing skills, and the introduction of online marking and authenticity checking of student work. Students praised the responsiveness and effectiveness of the support provided for mental health and disability, providing personal examples to illustrate how CTTC had helped them overcome difficulties to achieve success. Steps to avoid academic misconduct are thorough - from assessment design, support for academic writing and referencing to final checking, marking and moderation.

9 Admissions processes are underpinned by extensive documentation from the awarding body and there is evidence that the process is thorough and fair. Audition panels of three or four staff allow balanced and informed admissions decisions. Admissions staff consider the students' academic ability and commitment to succeed as well as their acting ability. The awarding body policy on equality, diversity and inclusion underpins the approach with actions taken to allow students to supplement low incomes and the provision of support for mental health (see paragraph 8). Although there are currently no students requiring wheelchair access, the construction of the learning space is accessible for all. The student welcome pack is comprehensive and informative, and the range and depth of information provided prior to arrival is appreciated by students, particularly those coming from abroad. Prior learning is recognised in accordance with the awarding body regulations.

10 Assessment processes are thorough. Briefs are designed in conjunction with the awarding body and contain clear information on achieving the learning outcomes and on how students will be assessed. A detailed operations manual covers all aspects of the learning process including assessment procedures, academic misconduct and claims for mitigation, all referenced to the awarding body regulations. Internal marking and second marking are supplemented by moderation conducted by the awarding body. The Director of Studies monitors the three-week turnaround for marking; a target that students confirm is met. CTTC employs a wide range of assessment activities including performance, viva, demonstration, seminar and written assessments with a balance of practical and theoretical work. Formative and summative feedback on assessed work is prompt, supportive and

developmental. Student progress is reviewed halfway through each year to monitor and support student learning through detailed individual learning plans.

11 The external examiner confirms that assessments are at the appropriate level and that marking is fair and consistent. The appointment of a further member of staff in response to the external examiner report strengthened teaching quality and pastoral care. CTTC responded to the external examiner suggestion of further staff development to secure consistency of marking. CTTC freelance specialist staff, who teach subjects such as voice and singing, also join in the staff development training and sharing of good practice, and most have been with the company for many years

12 Students value the experience of learning with working professionals in a working theatre. Teaching staff pass on their own industry experience and prepare them for employment with help in CV writing, audition practice and making industry contacts. Practical work and academic study complement each other with all assessments having clear learning objectives and assessment criteria. Staff development takes place during full-day staff meetings and development days. Recent topics for update or development included marking and standardisation, racial stereotyping, mental health, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the new UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

13 CTTC gathers and analyses demographic and module data to inform the delivery of the programme. In-year retention rates are 94% and 91% although, of the 28 students enrolled in September 2017, retention has dropped to 75%. Analysis shows that most withdrawals are for financial or family reasons. Of the 23 students who enrolled in September 2016, 18 (78%) passed the programme in September 2018. CTTC analyses recruitment demographics, seeking a diverse student body, and works with its awarding body to compare its favourable performance with their greater student cohorts.

Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

14 The Company demonstrates highly effective engagement with relevant external reference points, including the Quality Code. It aligns with appropriate external reference points through programme validation, assessment and staff development. The BA (Hons) Acting follows the Subject Benchmark Statement for Dance Drama and Performance (2015) and covers *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*, levels four, five and six in two years. Staff show good awareness of the Quality Code and are preparing for the implementation of the new Code. The Company invites representatives of relevant professional bodies as speakers and students are encouraged to become members of professional bodies.

Background to the monitoring visit

15 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Glenn Barr, Reviewer, and Monika Ruthe, QAA Officer, on 29 November 2018.

QAA2315 - R10322 - Jan 19

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2019
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050
Web www.qaa.ac.uk