

Rambert School of Ballet & Contemporary Dance

Student submission for TEF 2023

Written by (Second Year, Student Representative 2022/23) and
(Second Year, Student Representative 2021/22)

Approach to evidence-gathering

As current second year students we have a good understanding of our School. Our time here at Rambert has informed the writing of this submission, reflecting on the experiences and outcomes that we believe best represents this institution. The unique perspective that comes from being student representatives gives us an informed knowledge of the student body and its relation to the School's operation. Attending meetings, such as the Academic Quality and Standards Board, provides us with opportunities to build this understanding. We play an active role in the Student Engagement Framework understanding the responsibility of representing the student body.

Our lived experiences have been our primary source of information as we believe this conveys the student voice, most accurately, as a small institution. However, the data which we have collated confirms these narratives. The NSS results, data from the TEF dashboard, evidence from our own surveys and other published documents have informed the writing of this submission. Such sources gave us perspectives from the whole student body, ensuring the data provided a holistic response.

It was important that the same approach to data was extended to the writing of this submission. Being aware that our perspectives are limited to our own experiences, input from the wider student body helped to achieve this. Through sharing drafts with the student representation team: student representatives, elected individuals from each year group, and student advocates, individuals who provide a platform for marginalised voices; we have created a submission that accurately depicts the student dialogue. Open focus groups provided a space for these students to reflect on our writing and depiction of the School.

All the individuals who contributed to this submission are enrolled on the FD/BA (Hons) degree in Ballet and Contemporary Dance and so it depicts only this. Additionally, as second years, we did not experience the School during the Covid-19 pandemic so we have not included the impact of this on student experience and outcomes.

Rambert School has not unduly influenced the content of this student submission, but has supported us through this process. We have been provided with internal and external support, giving us access to evidence and documentation. Regular meetings provided opportunity to consult and ask questions on our submission. These student-led exchanges facilitated the writing of a document that accurately conveys our thoughts on Rambert School.

Student experience

For aspiring students the word excellence is arguably the central appeal to training under the name of Rambert School, with its notability in the industry attracting young dancers wanting to reach the calibre of the School's graduates. For current students, this level of distinction is more than words and reputation but a lived experience through the daily engagement of all that our School encompasses.

Our training environment consists of industry-standard facilities, specially tailored to our needs, which are renovated and improved where necessary to ensure this is always provided to the highest quality. Free and easy access to the gym, Pilates room, studios and library during the evenings, weekends and holidays makes supplementing our training easy and accessible to everyone, encouraging us to be proactive in furthering our education. The additional space created through the extension on Weston Studio, completed in 2022, enables more effective training whilst the academic year of 19/20 saw the refurbishment of Anya Linden Studio Theatre. With costs of over £340,000, this included new sound and lighting equipment to enhance students' in house performances. The investments into the facilities feel like an investment into us as students: they help us fulfil our potential the School believes us capable of.

This sense of investment is evident in the teaching delivered by the faculty. This is reflected in statistics such as 'The teaching on my course' exceeding the TEF benchmark by 9.2 percentage points. The time and care taken by staff to enhance our experience – whether that be learning, class accompaniment, performances – is evident and motivates us students to echo this in our work. It is inspiring to be taught daily by staff – both in house and external - whose wealth of knowledge comes from careers consisting of work we may have studied at A-level or followed before starting the School. Many faculty members are active in the wider industry so that our training feels engaged with current progressions and not confined to the School's walls.

Where a particular area of expertise is lacking amongst the teaching staff, the School invites industry professionals, around seventy-five every year, to help diversify our training whilst maintaining high standards. The School values this in our Rambert experience so deeply that second and third years have 'Fresh Friday' classes timetabled for this purpose, exposing students to new styles and practitioners weekly. Leading artists come to our studios to deliver classes from voguing to house, widening students interests and professional networking opportunities.

“Now that I'm in 2nd year I am fortunate enough to get to experience a programme called 'Fresh Fridays'. This is where the School bring in an external artist or choreographer each week to do a workshop with the 2nd and 3rd years. It's so nice to be exposed to so many different creatives so frequently.”

Second Year Student (Rambert School Spotlight, 2022)

The year 2021/22 saw six professional choreographers creating works with third year students, whilst additional projects welcomed Akram Khan Company and New Adventures to our studios. It is inspiring to see world-renowned practitioners including Sir Christopher Bruce, Akram Khan MBE and Dame Monica Mason walking our corridors as we go about our daily classes.

The excellence delivered by staff complements the excellence which the curriculum both enables and demands. As students at Rambert School, we are familiar with the term 'deep learning' and so understand how enrolling on the three year course means investing our time and effort into intense training to learn our art form in depth and to standards of excellence. Our timetable sees contact hours of 30-35 hours a week, plus additional student-led rehearsals and practice, building mental

and physical stamina for the rigours of professional work. Crucially it provides the necessary time to build good technique through repetition, experimentation and reflection so that we have a strong, deep-rooted understanding of our techniques and how our bodies relate to them. To monitor our progress, continuous assessment, assessment classes and solo assessments occur in each semester. Despite receiving a grade, there is an emphasis on grades not defining our abilities or potential but instead providing a useful opportunity for feedback and further reflection of our work. Feedback is received through 1:1 tutorials and written notes from teachers alongside daily verbal feedback in class. Teachers' eagerness to engage with student questions and self-reflections creates a culture of conversational feedback occurring daily between staff and students – whether this be at the end of class or through our Microsoft Teams platform.

Rambert School's rich history of excellence has been maintained through its pioneering approach to dance and training. As students, we recognise the importance of moving with changes to the arts but also being part of the action that makes the change in the first place. One way this is exemplified to students is through research and development amongst the faculty. Since 2018, Rambert School Research has engaged in eight research projects, whilst many of the staff currently undertake their own studies and engage with the Higher Education Academy (HEA). MA Programme Manager, and Pilates instructor and student injury support, are both Fellows of the HEA working alongside Senior Fellow Head of Studies.

Seeing our teachers engaging in research creates an environment of critical thinking within School whilst teaching students processes to conduct research themselves. We are shown the benefits of academic thought to our dance training whilst simultaneously providing opportunities for collaboration, creation and further training. MA has resulted in projects which have shown students how research benefits their work and has provided space for additional training and mentorship. PhD work on female Ballet choreography took three students to Oxford for a choreography residency in partnership with DANSOX/ St Hilda's College – Oxford University and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. The research project, 'Woman-made: The Future Ballet Choreographers are Here!', provided students with insightful workshops, industry connections and creative opportunities. The research at Rambert School directly improves the experience of students' day to day. Our own survey found that the majority of students responding, agree or strongly agree that 'faculty led and postgraduate research enhance my student experience'. Outcomes are used to make changes to our curriculum such as the Rambert School Research project 'Gender Neutral Solo'(2020/21), which provided an alternative to the previously gender binary solo assessments. This gender-neutral approach to Ballet is pioneering within professional Ballet and education and students are grateful to be training in a space that recognises the importance of studying in this way.

There are numerous ways that we feel our School is pioneering and provides us with a unique dance education. Rambert is the only institution in the UK to teach an equal split of Ballet and Contemporary techniques. For many dancers, they want the artistic benefits of training to high standards in both styles and this is the only School in the country to offer it. We are encouraged to embrace the rarity of this training, identifying where the techniques complement, contrast and aid each other in our performance and creative endeavours. We are provided with plenty of space and opportunity for such learning, for example through our bi-annual Platform show where students can present their own choreographies to external audiences. When asked what is her 'favourite thing about Rambert School?' (Rambert School Spotlight, 2022), third year student replied:

“My favourite thing about Rambert School is the Student Choreography Platform. It’s a true privilege to be able to make work on the inspiring people I train with, and an even greater one to also learn from them and their creative processes in turn. Platform is an invaluable opportunity to learn more about approaching choreography and how to express our choreographic voices, and it shows the immense creativity and range of Rambert’s students.”

(Rambert School Spotlight, 2022)

The course continues to be relevant to professional demands of graduates, simultaneously meeting current students’ needs and desires. In our own survey, a high number of responses showed that students either agreed or strongly agreed that ‘The course equips me for work after graduation’ whilst many also responded that they agree or strongly agree to the statement ‘I feel the course curriculum is engaging’. Arguably this is achieved through the constant dialogue between staff and students over the content and teaching. If there is an area of training which students feel would be beneficial, this is relayed through regular focus groups and appropriate changes are made. Such requests have seen additional pointe and virtuosity classes added to the timetable as students wanted more support in preparation for solo assessments and general technical improvements.

“At our school, they always ask to see if they can do more for us. We have student meetings and focus groups to share about what they can do to help and they always apply the feedback so quickly” (NSS feedback comment, NSS 2021)

The School's readiness and receptive responses to feedback is one of the many ways the School nurtures and celebrates the individual in every student. The focus groups, mentioned above, occur termly, providing time for the senior leadership in the School to sit down with each year to reflect on the student experience. Enabled by the relationship of mutual respect between staff and students, it feels a safe environment to express our genuine thoughts knowing that the appropriate consideration and response will occur. Students are aware and make use of additional modes for feedback such as the use of annually elected student representatives for each year group. Having representatives amongst peers furthers the effective dialogue that occurs continuously with faculty whether this be informally or through attending Academic Quality and Standards Board. We exceed our TEF benchmark for ‘Student voice’ by 15.4 percentage points proving this case.

In situations of personal concern, Rambert has implemented an open-door policy. Despite sounding formal, this simply means office doors are always open meaning access to support is always available. Not only does this make approaching staff easy but it also encourages students to keep an open dialogue with staff on day-to-day occurrences, reducing barriers when more serious action is required. Our Microsoft Teams platform extends this support out of the School’s walls and hours of the School day through direct message or calls. Tailoring support can therefore be quick and effective as the staff knows each student well.

“I feel like I can talk to my teachers and my peers about anything and know I’ll get good help” (NSS feedback comment, NSS 2022)

Where support is needed for injury, the Screening Treatment & Rehabilitation Unit (STRU) provides effective recovery tailored to one's physical needs already made known to staff through screenings at the start of first year. In the past four academic years (2018/19 to 2021/22), there has been 3,187 STRU appointments showing its value in student wellbeing. Importantly, STRU incorporates pastoral care, utilising the staff’s individual knowledge of each student to help us through the specific emotional areas we may personally struggle with as a result of injury. Regardless of injury, School

is aware of the emotional difficulties of the course and wider life. If the support required cannot be adequately provided by faculty, then students can be directed to external professionals such as counsellors and nutritionist employed through the School. Where students may not feel confident to come forward, the high contact hours and constant dialogue means staff can intervene where an area needs addressing. There is a sense amongst the student body that staff have an accurate knowledge of our wellbeing.

The willingness of staff to help students creates trust between us and the faculty. We are taught to be proactive in asking for help and shown the benefits of this. We feel supported in all areas. Technically, coaching sessions are particularly useful where students have started Rambert with different levels of training. For academic support, there are faculty members who specialise in essay writing, dyslexia support and language support which again recognises the different needs of students from language barriers to prior education. The extent of support available across all aspects of School is arguably the most significant way Rambert values us as individuals. They understand and ultimately value the different experiences, level of training, neurodiversity and personality of every student and recognise that this affects their experience at School. Support is accessible and tailored so that our differences are not a hindrance but a strength and an opportunity for success as an individual.

Student Outcomes

Enhancing excellence by investing in individuals. Rambert School continues to succeed in developing exceptionally trained dancers. With its pioneering teaching delivery, the School prepares students for more than a professional career in dance.

There is a drive and desire within the School to train not only technically strong dancers, but ones that are versatile and creative. With the notion of 'deep learning' in mind, Rambert generates confident dancers that are ready for the professional working world. Initiatives such as the second year repertory project give students a two week rehearsal period on an industry-leading choreographer's work. The intense training with external practitioners provides us with the vital skills of learning a pre-existing piece of repertory, ready for a performance.

The educational gains of Rambert School are relevant because students come to the School with an intention for a professional career in dance, be it performative or choreographic. By spending any period of time in the School's building you get to know and truly understand how the School's excellence approach supports students to achieve their ambitions, and this can be evidently seen in our plethora of successful Rambert alumni. This is further supported by the School's outstanding TEF Student outcome results, of which all have exceeded the benchmark.

Getting practitioners to repeatedly come into the School demonstrates in itself how well Rambert is doing at generating highly-skilled dancers, that industry professionals want to work with. Additional opportunities arise from initiatives like these, beyond the course's training, giving students greater agency over their artistic career and development. For example, in January 2022 Akram Khan's company came to the School to work with third year students on the research and development of an upcoming production. From this process last academic year, one recently graduated student has gone on to join the company as an apprentice and then has further received a contract as a full cast member for this production. This is extremely exciting for the School and us as students, explicitly showing how Rambert is actively developing and supporting dancers by providing opportunities through connections like these.

Seeing recent graduates in shows and performances motivates students. Going to watch one of your fellow students perform encourages us in our training as we see a potential end goal or career highlight being achieved. In School, we see a continued demand for Rambert School students for external projects, collaborations and jobs. There is an eagerness to work with the students and so this justly is reflective of the quality of training its students are receiving.

Our curriculum is specially tailored and finely tuned to not only the legacy that Rambert School holds but the standards which the industry requires of graduates today. The 50:50 split between Ballet and Contemporary dance is what makes Rambert so unique, especially within the UK. This is even more necessary as the demand for versatile dancers within the professional industry is ever growing. Working in the well established 50:50 model, alongside listening to the student's voice, through student reps, focus groups and the Staff-Student Consultative Committee, creates a secure environment and makes us feel more valued as members of the School.

The first year has a strong focus on technique and is specifically designed to lay a solid foundation on which to develop and build upon throughout the course. The contact hours we have with classes allow for maximum time with staff, in industry-standard facilities, so that we can achieve our excellent standard of training.

An exciting option in third year is the opportunity to have a working placement in industry. Supported by the School, students are encouraged to consider these experience opportunities where professional development is enabled, aligning with the academic expectations of the degree. This shows us that Rambert is an accommodating School, that is truly seeking the prosperity of its students.

We see very few students dropping out throughout the course, shown in the TEF Continuation data where we exceed the benchmark value by 6.3 percentage points. This has a positive impact on the year groups, as we encourage one another throughout the journey of the programme. It also boosts the morale of students, being able to continue to train in a tight knit, supportive environment, with fellow students you know.

Rambert is not a static place, both physically and intentionally, with students moving day in and day out. Over time the creative world outside also changes, and so does the School. With the use of a continuous dialogue, adaptations and changes are implemented.

The dialogue between staff and students is pioneering in the way that it not only allows for the faculty to get to know us well but also for them to hear and listen to the students when change may be needed. Staff generate a coherent understanding of each and every student, due to the scale of the School and high contact hours. This provides opportunities for support to be actioned where necessary, be that individually or collectively as a cohort.

Students are further supported by staff in extracurricular projects, beyond our daily timetabled classes. For example, in preparation for the student choreography Platform shows, many teachers often stay to assist in rehearsals, and offer advice and encouragement to the student choreographers as they navigate their creative visions.

“Platform offers students the freedom to develop their own ideas, push boundaries and find their own unique style”

(Rambert School, What’s On – Platform 2021)

Student choreography is encouraged and well supported at Rambert School. Innovation is at the heart of Rambert and Platform really encompasses that in a nutshell. Allowing students creative freedom to explore, in a dance conservatoire that could easily be a constrictive environment, just shows how visionary Rambert is to support the creation of expressive and versatile dancers, ready for the industry.

Before even stepping foot in the School for the first time you are treated and supported as an individual. Due to the very scale and size of Rambert, and high contact hours in the studios, students and staff get to know one another very well.

All Students are screened for dyslexia upon arrival in first year, and there is an abundance of support in place by the likes of specialist staff members to assist if English is a second language, support for the DSA, and any other areas requiring further academic support.

In terms of a practical side, there is extra support readily available and widely used by students on a day to day basis. With the likes of STRU and our onsite osteopath, we feel safe and reassured if any injury or niggle arises. Gaining a greater understanding of injuries, students move forward with an increased knowledge about their bodies, that can be used beyond studies and throughout their professional careers. Above all, our wellbeing will also be cared for through this, with staff members

looking out for students as a result of the considerable knowledge they have of each of us individually.

Another key component that Rambert is particularly proud of is the open-door policy. For students, this means we are able to access and seek assistance from any staff member at any point. This helps to build upon those invaluable relationships between staff and student, further contributing to the individualised approach of our School, caring and supporting for the individual on personal and relational level.

“The aid and support from the school is imbedded throughout each class and aspect of student support. They really listen to their students and provide amazing training with a strong sense of community.” (NSS feedback comment, NSS 2021)

Being a part of this School, especially in a time of great development and self-discovery when vocationally training, is exceedingly inspiring. The opportunity to be able to grow in a safe, supporting environment is so precious. Having the space and time to develop one-self and find your own artistic voice is immensely valuable in preparation to step foot into the ever-developing, professional dance industry. It was Marie Rambert herself that identified this importance of originality and wanting to encourage this for each individual.

“Rambert School has such a peaceful, welcoming warmth that is pretty hard to explain until you’re here... it feels like family. I love every single person at Rambert School; all of the staff and faculty are so supportive, caring, passionate, and genuine. I feel blessed to be a part of the Rambert School family.”

Second Year Student (Rambert School Spotlight, 2022)