

Provider submission

1. Provider Context

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (Central, or the School) is a drama and theatre arts conservatoire located in Swiss Cottage, close to the heart of London's theatre district, that serves the needs of both UK and international performance industries. Its mission, articulated in its strategic plan 2020–23, is to “inspire, educate and train the performers, practitioners and change-makers of tomorrow to shape the future of theatre and the performing arts”ⁱ.

Central offers its students highly bespoke training courses across all areas of theatre performance, including acting, applied theatre, dramaturgy, experimental performance, production design scenography, stage management, and writing. For over a century, the theatre profession has benefitted from Central's uniquely bespoke and focused teaching programmes, with three extensive undergraduate programmes in actor training, technical theatre and applied, community and social theatre; twelve Master of Arts and seven Master of Fine Art programmes; and one of Europe's largest doctoral programmes in the subject discipline, with a focus on practice-based research. Its graduates work at the highest levels in industry nationally and internationally.

From its outset, Central aspired to do more than train actors: the legacy of founder Elsie Fogerty's commitment to the social importance of theatre education still lies at the heart of our institutional mission to develop practitioners and researchers able to shape the future of drama, theatre, and performance. Today, this mission continues, given renewed impetus under the leadership of our new Principal, Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE, appointed in August 2021. Josette was recently named in The Stage 100 for 2023 (the most influential people working in theatre and the performing arts), citing her bold and consistent advocacy for change in the theatre education sector and her opposition to financial cuts and government policies that damage arts education.

Our Provision

Central delivers three undergraduate degree programmes with honours, each with specialist courses:

BA(Hons) Acting	Acting; Collaborative & Devised Theatre; and Musical Theatre
BA(Hons) Contemporary Performance Practice	Drama, Applied Theatre, and Education; Performance Arts; and Writing for Performance
BA(Hons) Theatre Practice	Costume Construction; Design for Performance; Lighting Design; Production Lighting; Prop Making; Scenic Painting for Stage and Screen; Scenic Construction for Stage and Screen; Sound Design and Production; and Stage Management and Technical Theatre.

Our undergraduate student body of 664 undergraduates represents 63.3% of the total student population. Central's 373 MA/MFA students (34.3%) and 26 PGR students (2.4%) comprise the highest postgraduate population of students in the European drama school sector. Our undergraduates benefit from being part of this wider environment of specialist provision, with staff teaching across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and students undertaking placements and early career teaching on undergraduate degrees. 26% of students are international, from 45 countries worldwide. Whilst the School's undergraduate programmes' entry

requirements include minimum UCAS tariff points, performance in audition and/or interview is the key factor in determining selection. We believe that this method provides a more accurate picture of applicants' potential to succeed within our intensely practical, conservatoire-focused model of education. Students thus arrive at Central with diverse prior academic attainment: approximately 20% of our UK-domiciled undergraduate intake between 2018-21 would be ineligible to access student finance were the government to set minimum eligibility requirements in GCSE English and maths (per the Department for Education's 2022 consultation).

Central's conservatoire models of intensive physical and technical training, extended and informed by industry engagement, is integrated with a research environment of active staff research that is coupled with a research degree programme. Central's distinctiveness as a research-intensive conservatoire produces graduates who challenge the parameters of the discipline and produce new art and knowledge. Through industry-related and research seminars, Central provides a forum for professional and academic peers to engage with global scholarly and research discourses and practices.

In December 2022, Central was one of 20 specialist higher education providers recognised by the Office for Students as world-leading for its teaching and education activities and awarded Institution Specific Targeted Allocation (ISTA) additional funding. In its feedback to the School, the Specialist Provider Panel noted Central's high reputation internationally for its teaching programmes, its commitment to equity and inclusion from which other providers are learning, the success of graduates from all sections of the institution in getting jobs across the industry in every way and every context, including within the digital and gaming sectors, and the economic and cultural impact of its graduates.

Education and Inclusion

Central takes a strategic approach to the improvement and enhancement of learning and teaching, inflected by and braided through our strategic commitment to inclusion and diversity. The School celebrates and values the diversity of its workforce and students and believes that its community benefits from recruiting people of different ages, abilities, identities, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, genders, religions, and beliefs. We believe that good pedagogy, like good theatre, is fundamentally connected to global citizenship in our diverse world and we seek practically and discursively to embed equality and diversity in all our teaching, in order to ensure an inclusive and equitable basis from which all students have opportunities to develop as world-leading artists, thinkers and practitioners.

Our split metric data on the experience of under-represented students shows positive indicators, with responses to NSS questions from our Black students significantly above threshold, including: 'Teaching on my course' +9.4%; Assessment and feedback' +3.7%; 'Academic support' +1.6%; 'Learning resources' +5.8% and 'Student voice' +2.3%. Given the recent challenges faced by Central with the fallout from a student-led 'Dear White Central' event and the School's acknowledgement of institutional racism and inequity, these data are welcome indicators that our efforts and interventions are producing positive outcomes.

Central's Strategic Plan 2021-2023 affirms our commitment to a distinctive and transformative educational and training experience for our students, one that places diversity, difference and collaboration at the centre of learning and teaching activity. Similarly, the School's Learning,

Teaching and Student Experience Plan 2021-2023 outlines the objectives that support our aim to provide a dialogic, innovative and inclusive education including ensuring students can see themselves reflected in the curriculum and can draw on their own backgrounds in assessments. Our Equity and Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2023ⁱⁱ seeks to ensure that principles of equity and inclusion are embedded in all learning and teaching at Central via an evolving EDI framework for course development and review, validation, and annual monitoring. The School is committed to decentring, decolonizing and repairing the curriculum and practicing equity and inclusion in our learning and teaching through an ongoing reflective process.

In 2022, an institutional portfolio review – led by the chair of Central’s Independent Equity Committee, an advisory body formed of Black and Global Majority industry professionals and academics with experience and expertise in anti-racist leadership in arts and education – centred questions of equity and inclusion in curriculum development at the School, making recommendations for the ongoing enhancement of Central’s programmes. A restructure of academic provision in 2022 has led to the establishment of academic departments - in Performance, Practice, and Production - whose purpose is to enhance the management, oversight and leadership of learning and teaching and the holistic student experience.

COVID-19

Central’s journey over the past four academic years is inflected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, impacting all students at all levels (and some across each year of studying with us). As a small and specialist provider, Central benefitted from concessions to lockdown protocols and during 2020/21 was able to plan and deliver its curriculum for one-third onsite delivery, following early re-entry to campus in the summer of 2021. For 2021/22, this was increased to 75% of normal onsite delivery prior to the return to ‘normal’ from the summer of 2022. The pandemic however had a significant and disproportionate impact on practical performing arts training, not least necessitating professional studios, workshops and classrooms be replaced by students’ domestic spaces.

Despite our ability to deliver aspects of our provision onsite during this time, as with the entire UK higher education sector the offer to and experience of our undergraduate students was significantly different to what would otherwise have been delivered. The high-contact, resource-intensive context in which we normally train our students was necessarily adapted in the interests of protecting students’ safety, without halting their development and achievement ahead of transitioning into the society, professions, and industries where they are needed.

Our student experience metrics for 2020/21 and 2021/22 show performance at 12.8% and 9.3% below benchmark, respectively, in the area of learning resources. In both of these years, students’ ability to access resources onsite was significantly impacted by COVID-safe restrictions; industry-standard workshops, studio spaces, and other facilities and resources were of necessity replaced by living rooms and bedrooms. The School nevertheless worked closely with its Students’ Union to ensure that targeted support was available for (and couriered to) students who required specific equipment for learning-related activities and/or for other reasons (for example, because of digital poverty). Central thus purchased 40 additional laptops to lend to students during the period of lockdown; 10 data dongles for loan to those struggling with internet access; and 100 Adobe Creative Cloud licenses for students who required Adobe as a core part of their learning. In

addition, Central's Library ran a 'click and collect' service during this period, as well as sending resources directly to students' home addresses.

National Student Survey

A limiting factor in the data available within the metrics dashboard from the National Student Survey (NSS) is our students' decision not to participate in the survey in protest of the marketisation of higher education. This resulted in the 2018/19 and 2019/20 surveys not meeting publication thresholds for both programme- and institution-level data.

2. Student Experience

Learning, teaching, and assessment

Central's undergraduate courses have developed from its long history of professional training rooted in the traditions of conservatoire teacher-student relationship. The School works to an industry model of high intensity training, coaching, rehearsal and production. As a member of the Federation of Drama Schools (FDS), Central's training is aligned with the FDS's Core Principles for Training, as well as its 'Hallmarks and Values' and underpinning 'Principals of Course Design' and 'Ethical Guidelines'.ⁱⁱⁱ And as a member of Conservatoires UK, the School is committed to its principles of best practice in conservatoire education^{iv}. Central's conservatoire-aligned training necessitates 1:1 training in some skills (voice training, singing, theatre practice skills) and small group training (movement, theatre practice). All courses at Central deliver specialist training in small cohorts, with student-staff ratios (SSR) of between 10:1 and 18:1, taught by our faculty of academics recognised as experts in their fields, and Visiting Lecturers and Visiting Industry Professionals. Central's specialist training is also time intensive, with courses averaging between 18 and 35 taught contact hours per week, significantly higher than generalist university drama departments.

Central's pedagogic approach is distinct from both generalist university and other Conservatoire courses in drama, theatre, and performance due to its integration of principles of professional training from the history of the conservatoire (small class size, intensiveness, industry specialism) with pedagogy developed through research, scholarship, and enquiry. Our courses are led by course teams of experienced full-time staff, headed up by course leaders engaged directly in professional work with industry, and world-leading research and scholarship.

The hallmarks of Central's signature pedagogy are thus: a) specialist and bespoke; b) intensive and applied; c) small group and personalised training; d) integration of research and industry expertise.

Central's overarching approach to assessment and feedback is to demonstrate the outcomes of students' academic and practical skills development, providing them with a chance for reflective development throughout their studies, enabling them to consider their personal and professional growth and to take ownership of their learning.

Assessment and feedback combine conservatoire methods with the best broader sector practice. Students receive frequent 'crits' (that is, in situ oral evaluations of their work from staff, either individually or in a discursive group) and constant formative verbal feedback on practical

performance as part of the coaching/ rehearsal/ production model described above. This feedback is summatively framed by reflective self- and tutor-assessment feedback processes, which employ a range of methodologies from peer group discussion to the submission of journals, reflective portfolios, and essays, alongside practical outcomes. These evaluatively reflect on and contextualise practical learning and performance in relation to relevant critical and artistic contexts, as well as to assessment criteria aligned to the FHEQ and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. In common with most conservatoires, Central does not use unseen, written examinations.

We place a strong emphasis on working with students of all levels to introduce and explain the critically reflective assessment methods used in higher education arts disciplines. This can prove challenging for those students used to examinations and less discursive feedback, particularly our international cohort. We responded to this challenge in 2020 with the creation of an International Learning Skills Co-ordinator post, employed to run a bespoke academic support programme and service for our international students. Assessment literacy and confidence can also present particular challenges for students with diagnoses of dyslexia and other learning differences; for 2021/22, 32% of Central's students had a declared disability. The School can nevertheless reflect on some recent success in the area of assessment literacy, with respondents to the National Student Survey 2022 expressing 13.6% greater satisfaction than 2021 respondents about the clarity of its assessment criteria. The impact of recent work that Central has done in the area of inclusive academic practice can also be seen in the student experience measures for assessment and feedback for Black students +3.7% above benchmark.

It is worth noting that recent reports from the School's External Examiners – with 7 examiners appointed across the undergraduate degrees - also provide a more nuanced account of the successes of its highly individuated approach to assessment and feedback:

“The assessment design, schedule and range of projects is entirely appropriate to the level of study across the course, and what was particularly apparent this year was the skills development scaffolded through first and second year to enable a high level of attainment in independent creative practice at level 6. [...] The feedback viewed is detailed and effective and maintains the register of the collaborative mentor/project director, while drawing upon signposting and advice that is often strengthened by a more academic and formal tone/vocabulary. Feedforward continues to be the most frequent approach which is good to see as most appropriate for the sector and institution.”

BA

Acting External Examiner, 2022

“There is a wide variety of assessment methods on operation which caters for a range of abilities and preferences in the student body.”

BA

Contemporary Performance Practice External Examiner, 2022

“The feedback to students was clear, useful and consistent across markers. Most assessors made detailed bespoke comments that would motivate the student's development, both in terms of subject specificity but also as a holistic human being on a learning trajectory.”

BA Theatre Practice External Examiner, 2022.

Alongside our students and the Students' Union, a key issue we have identified which contributes to our low metric performance for assessment (-15% and -12% for Years 3 and 4) is the timeliness

of feedback. Our NSS score for 2022 saw only 43% of respondents agree that feedback was timely, falling nearly 10% from the year before. Timeliness of feedback turnaround has been exacerbated by increasing numbers of students awarded assessment extensions during 2021/22, including through the application of mitigating circumstances. However, we have committed to reducing our turnaround which has already seen a 2-week reduction piloted in some courses for 2022/23.

The above quotes from our external examiners have been at odds with our student survey outcomes for feedback quality during the period under review, with 66% and 63% of students in Years 3 and 4 reflecting that comments on work have been helpful. Through discussions with course teams as part of annual monitoring, it has been recognised that students do not aggregate the high levels of formative developmental feedback given to students - often verbally, in classroom and studio settings - with written feedback on summative work. This is an issue we also feel will benefit from a shortened turnaround period for sharing student feedback.

The efficacy of Central's developmental approach to student feedback and assessment is borne out by the very positive student outcomes in terms of their final degree classifications, as detailed later within the submission.

Course content and delivery

Actor Training

Central's cluster of acting programmes encompass vocational approaches to acting, actor training, and dramatic writing, focussing on intensive specialist training informed by contemporary industry needs and standards.

Central offers an unusually diverse range of courses in acting. Our undergraduate acting programme features three distinct courses: Acting, focusing on speech, language, and identity; Acting (Musical Theatre), exploring sung and spoken voice, movement, and dance; and Acting (Collaborative and Devised Theatre), focussing on imagination, collaborative creation, and featuring delivery alongside international theatre organisations. This diversity of intensive acting programmes is unique to the conservatoire and HE drama sector in the UK. Our acting courses benefit from intensive teaching, small group sizes, and 1:1 tuition. Undergraduate courses in acting have a rigorous pattern of delivery, with an average of 30 hours training per week over nine 10-week terms, and an average cohort size of 18 (SSR 10:1).

Throughout their studies, students benefit from 1:1 teaching for skills including voice, movement, and dialect. Small cohort sizes allow for flexibility in meeting individual student needs and reacting to industry changes, as supported by External Examiner (BA Acting): "[I]t was excellent to see the diversity of the assessments, and how they address both the industry changes, the demands of the pandemic, and the transformations to meet student needs at Central and other drama schools over the past year which I think is to be commended" (2020/21). Our students highly value the quality of teaching, second only to general positive experience of units in Course Committees with 51 discrete references to enjoyment of teaching and various teachers.

Students reflect comparatively strongly within the School's NSS on their experience of teaching, with *teaching on my course* averaging 74% for 2021 and 2022. A contributing factor to our

performance below benchmark is the extent to which students report feeling challenged to achieve their best work (63.7 % in 2021 and 69.5% in 2022). It is important to reflect on the COVID-impacted context within which much of this work was produced. Students were certainly challenged in how they produced work, and rose to that challenge as shown in their degree outcomes later in this submission. Above and beyond the measures we were able to implement to minimise the disruption caused by the pandemic - and the concomitant sub-optimal practical learning conditions - their enjoyment of that process was unavoidably diminished.

Collaboration on the twenty plus professional productions Central stages annually offers an enriching, supportive environment for learning and an opportunity to showcase students' practice at full professional standard. Our undergraduate provision represents the ecology of working practice in the performing arts, with Acting courses collaborating with those in Theatre Practice in a holistic 'real world' company model. In addition, on these productions, students work with leading professional industry coaches, choreographers, designers, directors and stage-managers.

Undergraduate programmes prepare students for the stage through focus on a substantial number of taught sessions in practical skills training and development, student- and staff-led rehearsals, and situating student learning within the production environment. Public productions expose students to working with supervised production support services from our theatre practice and production teams and courses, and student development is underpinned by a programme of ongoing feedback and support from peers as well as a comprehensive tutorial scheme.

Theatre Practice and Production

Our longstanding Theatre Practice and Production provision comprise nine undergraduate courses which focus on discipline-specific professional pathways which enable students to graduate directly into the industry. These courses retain their reputation through the quality of their provision and their position in a vital pipeline that feeds the UK's world-renowned theatre and film industries with expertise in theatre design, craft, and production. The intensity of teaching here involves an average of 30 contact hours per week for undergraduate courses, indicating a high level of specialist professional tuition. External Examiner Scott Palmer (University of Leeds) validates the approach of this area, stating of the BA Theatre Practice programme that it "holds a unique place within UK HE. The distinctiveness of the programme is largely as a result of the experience that is offered to students, the unique environment at Central and the close links with the theatre and performance industry" (2020/21). Theatre Practice sits at the heart of the School, with students collaborating with and across the undergraduate and postgraduate Acting and Applied courses, creating robust industry-informed and relevant skills and opportunities for students.

Theatre Practice graduates embark on their careers fully equipped with experience and understanding of professional models of practice as well as critical thinking and a consciousness of why they are undertaking their career pathways. Rigorous research, praxis, and reflection underpin honours degree quality with vocational outcomes. Central is unique in retaining its discipline-specific approach and this has resulted in high levels of employment in the industry. For example, in 2020–21, all graduating students of BA Theatre Practice (Theatre Sound) obtained professional jobs within the discipline upon graduating.

Students' development is facilitated through scheduled and independent learning in production contexts, which deliberately simulate the physical and intellectual spaces they will need to inhabit

during their careers. Lectures, workshops, and masterclasses accompany studio-based teaching. Students on these courses also engage with placement opportunities.

Our production courses are an 'on-ramp' to the industry. Executive Producer of the RSC states that "The Royal Shakespeare Company has been very pleased to have worked with a number of graduates from Central's Stage Management and Technical theatre course and hope they continue to offer high quality training to those entering the industry" (2022). External Examiner also states: "the course has a pre-eminent position in terms of the number of graduates entering professional roles in theatre production" (2020/21).

Contemporary Performance Practices and Applied Theatre

Our Contemporary Performance Practice provision consists of one undergraduate programme comprising three courses (Drama, Applied Theatre and Education; Performance Arts; and Writing for Performance). Contact hours are on average 20 hours per week. Central prepares its students for working in society through comprehensive development of practical skills, such as improvisation, working with text and facilitation, significant grounding in academic theories through lectures and seminars from contracted academic staff and Visiting Professionals, and providing opportunities through placements and fieldwork to learn or practice in professional and community environments.

The undergraduate programme combines substantial practical activity and workplace learning with rigorous theoretical study. This has included ongoing work in a broad range of underrepresented communities: LGBTQIA+ youth (via Manchester LGBTQ+), young people with learning disabilities (through Starling, Manchester), children living with HIV (via Body and Soul), vulnerably housed people (with Homes for Haringey), isolated seniors (Elfrida Rathbone, Camden), hospitalised patients with dementia (Kings College London and Imperial College London NHS Trust); as well as work internationally with youths, women, and teachers in India, with the theatre workshops in the slums of India featuring in the Made At Uni 100+ best breakthroughs that have improved everyday life, and workshops on gender with young people in South Africa.^v

All three courses in this programme are taught by practitioner academics with substantial input from Visiting Lecturers and Professionals, and it is the collaboration of research and teaching practice that brings about high-quality outputs and student attainment. For example, Dr Sylvan Baker's 'The Verbatim Formula' research project has allowed young people with care experience to become researchers. This project has recently been supported by an additional £75k in follow-on funding from AHRC. Dr Baker's research has fed directly into our strategy for supporting its care-experienced students, including becoming an institutional signatory to the Care Leaver Covenant. We have a bespoke support package available which includes a nominated member of staff who acts as a key point of contact for care leavers and who is able to refer applicants to our various support services for the duration of their studies, and a bursary for care leavers totalling £1000 per student for each academic year, which contributes to living costs and any other costs associated with studying.

Research and industry

Central students' academic experience is underpinned and enhanced by our internationally recognised and significant research, knowledge exchange (KE) and industry engagement and innovation.

Knowledge Exchange

Central mobilises its intensive teaching focus on practical learning in an ongoing two-way flow of knowledge with a wide range of industry partners, SMEs, and public sector stakeholders, such as local councils, primary and secondary educational provisions, NHS Trusts, Charities, and NGOs. This hybrid approach, articulated through the interplay between 'thinking, making, and doing', is key to building our strategy where both staff and students engage in practical research that informs and invigorates Central's vocational teaching contexts — as with the 'Wonder VR: Interactive Storytelling through VR 360 video with NHS Patients Living with Dementia' project which developed out of BA/MA applied theatre teaching activities and led to a KE Student Engagement grant from OfS/Research England (£566,262) and a number of prestigious awards: the National Dementia Care Award 2019 for Outstanding Arts and Creativity in Dementia Care and the *Guardian's* 2020 Teaching Excellence Award. The project was also a finalist in both categories of Drama Initiative and Drama Inspiration at the Music and Drama Education Awards 2022, for collaborative intergenerational work with Central, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, and Whitefield School, with Central graduate (Contemporary Performance Practice, Drama, Applied Theatre and Education) winning the Drama Inspiration award for work on the project.

Research

The strength of Central's undergraduate provision lies both in its proximity to cutting edge practice and research, as well how this directly informs our curriculum and pedagogy. In the recent REF 2021 exercise, Central's submission to UoA35 was ranked 1st for Conservatoires and 4th overall; 75% of Central's submitted activity was rated as world-leading (4*), and a further 19% as internationally excellent (3*). These outcomes speak to the vital role that Central and the small-specialist sector can play, but also reflect Central's inclusive and enabling vision of education and research. 23% of those submitted to REF 2021 identified as neurodivergent, and 24% were early career researchers (ECRs).

ECRs and PhD candidates are vital to the learning environment of our taught provision. Many of them have previously studied on Central's taught programmes, and play a key role in continuing and developing our taught activity informed by their contemporary and innovative research and practice research. Our ECRs and PhD candidates are inherently at the vanguard of their disciplines, challenging established practice. Our undergraduate students benefit from this through the work of our ECRs and PhD candidates who teach on their degrees.

Our vibrant PhD and ECR communities are supported, supervised and mentored by experienced senior colleagues, who all design and deliver research-informed teaching across our undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses, often co-creating ground-breaking work with students-as-researchers. This embedding of 'live' challenge-based research enquiry into taught

programmes not only exposes students to research, but also *research practice* early in their academic careers, instilling a rigorous, interrogative and ethical approach to learning.

Industry Engagement

Central's mode of training is essentially rooted in its vocational proximity to industry, and it employs many specialists from across the theatre sector to deliver it. To ensure that our students graduate with the skills and experience required by leading employers, those employers work with us closely to deliver the highest professional standards in training. Thus, on a day-to-day basis, Visiting Professionals from all specialist disciplines in the sector are involved in teaching or professional visiting work across our programmes, whether directing shows with acting students, bringing expertise, advice, and experience to writing students, or technical know-how around deploying specialist equipment to technical theatre students. Further, many full-time contracted staff at Central were recruited from industry roles themselves and continue to maintain an industry profile through ongoing professional engagements. This directly benefits our students who work with them through placements.

Evidence for the extent to which our programmes are designed to meet industry need is the amount of investment made in Visiting Professionals and Visiting Lecturers (professionals who directly teach on our programmes). Since 2015/16, Central has invested approximately £4.8m in Visiting Professionals to deliver aspects of training in direct relation to industry; while between 2015–2021, Central spent £3.7m on Visiting Lecturers. The BA Acting programme, between 2016–21, spent approximately £1.4m on Visiting Professionals. Of this sum, £300k was paid to professional theatre directors to direct student productions; £22k was spent on bringing in professional industry figures to deliver masterclasses; £253k was spent on bringing in industry professionals to deliver specialist workshops; and £8k was spent on fight directors, working with students on productions. During this period, we commissioned world-leading theatre directors and writers for our student productions, including

Many of those brought in during this period enhanced the calibre of our masterclass provision during the pandemic, enabling us to engage professionals who would otherwise have been unavailable. This was noted by student representatives particularly during our 2020 and 2021 Course Committees.

Evidence demonstrating that Central's training meets the needs of industry can be found in the large numbers of full-time lecturers who teach on Central's courses who are themselves current practitioners within the industry. Central has 81 academic staff on either full-time contracts or part-time contracts. Of our permanent academic staff and those on short-term contracts of over a year, 41 have current links with industry and have had a professional engagement within the last 3 years. 17 staff work in the actor training area, 10 in theatre practice and production, 6 in applied/social theatre, and 8 have performance practices or other forms of industry engagement;

Central's public impact through social, community and cultural engagement is significant. Reporting in this year's Higher Education Business and Community Interaction HESA submission reveals that across the years 2020-22, Central staff and students presented public works which attracted significant external audiences, including public lectures (3474 attendees), performances (86,807 attendees), and exhibitions (972 attendees). Students benefit from the experience of being part of a community where expectations of consistent professional public engagement are the norm.

Further evidence of industry engagement is the large number of vocational placements that inculcate in students a practical understanding of the professions for which they are being trained. Between 2018/19 and 2021/22, students working in 54 schools, undertaking 57 group projects in various arts organisations and social enterprises, 228 students completing professional placements and 59 organisations hosting residencies alongside 92 placements in drama schools, theatres and theatre companies as well as cultural organisations.

Academic staff recruitment and professional development

As part of our academic recruitment and selection process, all interviewees undertake observed teaching sessions and student input/feedback to panellists, signalling direct engagement with the student voice in the appointment process. Once academic staff are employed at the School, they participate in a Peer Observation of Teaching (POT) system. New academic members of staff are always observed twice as part of their probationary year, and other staff members continue with POT on an annual basis. The system informs discussion when the personal development of academic staff in relation to teaching, learning and assessment is reviewed at annual appraisal. The Director of Learning, Teaching and Inclusion interrogates the observation forms to identify themes for further exploration at the termly internal seminars on learning, teaching and assessment. This has led to, for example, external speakers talking about learning and teaching practices that support students with specific learning disabilities and mental health conditions. The impact of this can be seen in the positive flags received by the School in the TEF metrics relating to employment or further study for those students with a declared disability (as described later in this submission).

Of Central's 85 (67FTE) permanently contracted academic staff, 60% possess a teaching qualification. In total, 55 members of staff, including the School's technical support department, have successfully been recognised by Advance HE as National Teaching Fellows (2), Principal Fellows (1) Senior Fellows (8), Fellows (40), and Associate Fellows (4). The School offers a range of continuing professional development opportunities for all its academic and professional staff. As

well as specialist disciplinary development such as advanced certification in Linklater technique (voice) and Perdekamp Emotional Method (acting), IOSH and NEBOSH (industry standard health and safety), monthly academic staff training and information provide CPD in topics that have included writing research bids, managing academic workload, developing KE partnerships, ECR development, and PhD supervisor training. Central's Director of Learning, Teaching and Inclusion works directly with academic staff in developing their academic and teaching practices, with a particular emphasis on how they can be made more inclusive. Until 2020 Central ran an accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education leading to Fellowship of the HEA, which supported 20 members of staff over the course of four years. In 2022, the School's dialogic CPD route to fellowship was accredited by Advance HE supported by a programme of in-house staff training and development opportunities, including mentorship, a fellowship buddy-system and monthly seminar series in support of applications.

Central continuously invests in the professional development and updating of knowledge and expertise amongst its teaching faculty. Internal funding is made available through several schemes including Staff Development; Targeted and Pump Priming awards for Scholarship, Research and Knowledge Exchange activities; and Sabbatical Awards. Between 2018-22, Central provided £30,160 of support for professional development of its teaching staff. 34 staff received staff development funding during this time. In 2018 Central introduced a new funding scheme targeted at members of academic staff on its Teaching and Scholarship contract pathway. Between 2018-22, academic staff on Teaching and Scholarship contracts were awarded a total of £104,950 in funding towards scholarship projects and conference attendance. In the same period, Central committed £200,000 to supporting 25 Sabbaticals across both Teaching and Research and Teaching and Scholarship pathways.

In addition to their engagement with the relevant industries, Central's academic staff are also noted for the esteem in which they are held by the wider academic community. Central's staff work as external examiners for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes at universities and conservatoires across England, Scotland, and Wales. Between 2018 and 2022, 35 members of Central's faculty were engaged as external examiners for 78 programmes across 58 institutions. These include Trinity Laban, LAMDA, The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts, The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Birkbeck, The London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, King's College London, University of Manchester, University of York, De Montfort, The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, RADA, and Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

Central's staff also regularly conduct lectures, invited talks, seminars and masterclasses outside Central. Over the last four years Central's staff have conducted 171 lectures, talks and panel appearances, 78 seminars and 58 workshops or masterclasses at universities and conservatoires across the UK and overseas. Between 2018-22 Central's teaching staff delivered around 450 hours of lectures and keynotes, 650 hours of seminars and 400 hours of masterclasses outside of Central, both in person and online. These were attended or viewed by around 38,500 people at institutions ranging from Goldsmiths College, Oxford University, University of Glasgow and University of Warwick to The Institute of Contemporary Arts, the National Film and Television School, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in the UK; and internationally at institutions and venues including Theatre Works (Melbourne, Australia), the National Academy of Dramatic Art (Warsaw, Poland), University of California (USA), Aarhus University (Denmark), Vanderbilt University's Peabody College (Nashville, USA) and Shanghai Theatre Academy (China).

The impact and benefits of this engagement are twofold: Central's academic provision, learning support, and student services remain informed by sectoral best practice, and the School maintains a visible and influential role in (inter)national developments and debates.

Resources and support^{vi}

Estate

Central's physical environment underpins the nature of our teaching by enabling students to learn through experience in a range of flexible and professional-standard theatre facilities. Institution Specific Targeted Allocation (ISTA) funding has provided students with outstanding opportunities to develop their practice to an industry standard in a way that is not possible within a generalist university course in theatre and performance.

Central has been implementing a 6-phase Estate Master Plan Strategy to provide for long-term needs and ensure our environment remains of industry standard. The financial restrictions that come from being a small institution have made it necessary to implement the Master Plan in a phased way. Phase 5 was completed in January 2019 and comprised of a £16.7m investment to develop on the north of our site. In addition to our existing physical resources, our new North Block building increased Central's teaching and learning footprint by over 15%. The building significantly extended the School's capacity for production-based learning as well as work in digital audio-visual media. Housing five large, double-height studios, it includes a performance studio with flexible capacity for use as a galleried theatre; a sound studio with facilities that prepare students to work broadcast standard in film and new media; a movement studio with sprung floors; two fully equipped rehearsal studios; and a full range of ancillary spaces including new dressing rooms and teaching rooms. Working with our industry partners, the North Block's industry-leading new studio and theatre spaces are equipped with a range of sustainable, LED lighting and professional audio equipment. It houses state-of-the art digital infrastructure, enabling students to engage with the fast-developing worlds of integrated show-control and both video and audio networking. In addition, the brand new, acoustically-isolated, two story Sound Stage expands Central's media production capability, providing a facility for students, staff and industry to explore and develop the intersections between digital and live space, and between theatre, dramaturgy, gaming and virtual reality.

In autumn 2022, Central successfully bid to Strand 2 of the 2022 AHRC Creative Research Capability (CResCa) funding call for a total of £1.37m to enhance our digital and immersive theatre making capabilities. The successful bid will support Central's capacity to make a major impact in the creative and cultural economy through the upgrade of our current facilities and the launch of Performance Lab, a catalyst for challenge-led pedagogy, research and development in immersive and digital technologies. This funding will enable a significant upscaling of our technically innovative practice-led pedagogy and research, benefiting our students, staff and external partners and capitalising on opportunities for learning and teaching, research and commercial exploitation. Performance Lab enables students to learn how to use and develop emergent technologies through workshops with external partners in the creative industries, which also sets up a pipeline for future employment opportunities.

The industry standard of our teaching facilities ensures students have a fully up-to-date learning environment. As well as for core delivery, we support industry use of our facilities for example, the Association of British Theatre Technicians delivering training courses. The benefit of such

collaborations crystallise when students work alongside these organisations onsite; for instance, the annual Technology Showcase by White Light enables students to undertake rigging and programming of displayed equipment and work alongside professionals.

We supplement our onsite facilities with a range of professional and industry partners and venues. These opportunities for industry-emerged practice expose our students to professional theatre and venue operations enhancing opportunities for collaboration and graduate employment. Partner venues we have worked with 2018-22 include Camden People's Theatre, Jackson's Lane, Leicester's Curve Theatre, Queen's Theatre Hornchurch, Shoreditch Townhall and Theatre Peckham with students engaging in outreach and educational workshop activities with local schools.

Library and learning resources

Central students benefit from onsite and online access to a wide range of specialist print, digital and audio-visual materials for loan or reference, curated in partnership with academic colleagues and students. Support in accessing and utilising our resources is provided through our Information Skills programme. This programme covers subjects such as finding and searching information, evaluating information, and avoiding copyright infringement and plagiarism, supported by TurnItIn software training. Sessions are available to groups or 1:1, and recorded for future reference. As a federal member of the University of London, students, researchers and staff also have access to the Senate House Library's world leading collections, including their eResources.

Investment in a skilled Digital Learning Manager, , provides support to both students and staff in effective pedagogy through our Digital Platforms, which in turn supports the development of students' digital skills and enhances their learning experience. In response to student feedback, we significantly enhanced our digital resources with the commissioning of Brightspace, a new Virtual Learning Environment in 2018. The VLE ensures we are able to provide ongoing support for student learning, including accessibility of course learning materials; downloadable and accessible content; online portfolios for students to create, share, and reflect on their work, while receiving feedback from tutors; and technology that enables assessment of students' practical studio work via video and audio.

IT and Technical Resources

Central supports its students with in-house IT equipment, including computer labs, Wi-Fi and media resources for lectures including Zoom trollies and projection facilities. Further, Central houses a number of specialist resources including Mac suites equipped with industry standard software (such as Adobe Creative Cloud, QLAB and Dante for sound design) to ensure students are trained and fully capable of succeeding whilst working in our related industries during and after their studies. Future investment priorities for the coming years include upgrades to our broadband and Wi-Fi infrastructure and the completion of a creative computer lab with 30 high specification desktops.

Central's Technical and Production Department covering all aspects of production technology, including lighting, sound, staging, and rigging. Technical support staff deliver equipment inductions to ensure students acquire professional standards of competence in the use of specialist equipment. They also offer practical advice on how to use equipment as well as how to work collaboratively with technical support in a production scenario. Ensuring that the technical support underpins teaching outcomes requires a high degree of professional expertise, and all Technical

and Production staff remain actively engaged in the industry, sitting on industry boards such as the Professional Lighting and Sound Association (PLASA), the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT), Production Managers Forum, and the Trailblazers Group for NCCI Wardrobe Apprenticeships. Working in industry leads to collaboration and innovation that enhances our teaching environment, with students benefitting from our involvement in leading industry developments.

Support for Learning

To further enhance the student experience and underpin teaching outcomes, Central is committed to ensuring that its students receive the pastoral support and advice that can enable them to focus on and succeed in their studies; our support services are developed in response to student feedback and demographic changes amongst the cohort and in society more broadly.^{vii}

An average of 39% of Central's undergraduate students declared a disability between 2018/19 and 2021/22 – the largest proportion having a specific learning difference or a mental health condition. Approximately 200 students (one-fifth of the overall student population) are registered with and receive support from its Neuro-Inclusion and Disability Service (NDS). In the last academic year, 90 students received 1:1 Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) Study Skills Support, whilst 46 students received 1:1 Mental Health mentoring. Students with disclosed learning needs are assessed by the NDS team to support inclusive learning, teaching, and assessment: to this end, 116 undergraduate students in the current academic year have a tailored Reasonable Adjustments Plan.

The scale of students receiving support is not unusual for an institution specialising in the performing arts, and we work in partnership with students and the Students' Union to support continual enhancement of support services. In response to internal feedback, also reflected in our academic support metrics (9.9% and 7.6% below benchmark for 2020/21 and 2021/22 respectively), we have developed specific initiatives and strategic investment decisions whose results have improved student outcomes and the student experience. Key developments include:

- In 2019, the School co-located its various support services to form the Student Centre leading to a more joined-up and proactive approach to student support. This has meant that wellbeing-related issues can be more effectively managed, to the benefit of the students and their learning experience.
- In 2018/19, Central introduced the Support Advisor supplementing existing student support-related roles (specifically year- and personal tutors within undergraduate academic programmes) in order to more effectively manage and resolve issues that individual students face before they escalate — improving student retention. Support Advisors offer bespoke advice and guidance on a range of support and wellbeing challenges that students might be facing. All our staff receive training in specialist areas, including supporting victims of sexual violence, unconscious bias, Mental Health First Aid, peer support, conflict resolution, and mediation.
- Central offers free 60-minute dyslexia screening appointments with specialist tutors. From 2020/21, Central increased the FTE of its Dyslexia Tutor by 0.2 in order to support the increase in student demand for this service. In the same year, it also began to subsidise students' Educational Diagnostic Assessments, contributing £230 to the overall cost of £330, with £15k of fundraised monies having been allocated for this subsidy.

- In 2021, the NDS team's 1:1 Specialist Support Tutors were the joint winners of the Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education's Institutional Award, "[r]ecognising the work of a department or team working in further/higher education and their contribution to the promotion, support, diagnosis or recognition of dyslexia and the support of dyslexic students."

As a result of these initiatives, and the supportive environment it produces for all students, Central sees consistently excellent retention rates, with an average non-continuation of less than 4%, against a peer benchmark of 7.1%. Qualitative student feedback underscores its success in this area.

Student engagement

Central is committed to engaging its students in the improvement and enhancement of their academic experiences. The student voice is embedded throughout the School's deliberative structures: Students' Union officers and student representatives are members of the Academic Board and the majority of its sub-committees including the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee and Quality and Standards Committee. Course Committees provide students with the opportunity to feed back on their learning and wider School experiences to academic and professional services staff; a 'digest' of Course Committee feedback is presented each term to Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee, to inform institutional actions and decision making. Responses from student surveys – including the National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), as well as internal surveys such as a New Starters Survey which is run every autumn – are considered at all levels of the institution, including by the Board of Governors, and used in quality management and enhancement activity. Central has further recently begun to utilise students in other non-academic processes: for example as members of student disciplinary panels, in order to develop understanding of and engagement with that procedure.

Our student representation system acts informally and formally to address issues. Our course teams maintain strong relationships with their reps, with ongoing dialogue between reps, their classmates and staff to identify and address issues during the year. When issues cannot be immediately addressed, are recurrent, or require further discussion, our formal Course Committees provide the forum for these important exchanges. Here, issues relating to students' academic and wider experience are considered and necessary actions identified and monitored. Between 2018/19 and 2021/22, 1079 individual issues were raised in our five undergraduate Course Committees. Only 3% of these were identified as not being possible to address, with the majority of cases relating to ongoing estates and resource development. Other outcomes included the referral of issues to in-house helpdesks and signposting of internal support teams and mechanisms (also 3%).

The above statistics demonstrate a significant amount of work being undertaken in response to Course Committee issues. However, only 8% of issues within Course Committees identify immediate resolution as having taken place (either in-meeting or in pre-meetings to agree discussion points between Chairs and representatives). Much of the monitoring of ongoing actions is recorded in subsequent versions of committee minutes, which was introduced just prior to the period under review. What this data shows us – as well as our student voice metrics (12.3% and 15.1% below benchmark in Years 3 and 4 respectively) – is that we need to work on the visibility of

how actions are being carried forward. We also must continue to support the work of our student representatives in feeding back to their cohorts about progress in relation to the issues they raise. It is less clear to our non-rep students how Central has responded to that feedback, and indeed both student representatives and academic staff have anecdotally reported on the challenges of 'closing the loop'. The introduction of academic departments at the School in 2022/23 is intended in part as a strategic response to this challenge, and will provide a transformative opportunity to engage the student voice more systematically across the institution. A wholesale reimagining of the Course Committee structure will follow, and Heads of Department will play a critical role in supporting and enabling students to contribute to decision making at the School.

A key step taken ahead of the current academic year has been the development of programme-level student voice action plans, in which academic teams have been required to enumerate transparently to students the steps they are taking to improve their experience, highlighting the evidence they have used to identify these actions. These action plans will be published and made available through Central's intranet. Further, the Principal and Vice-Principal (Curriculum and Students) have initiated regular drop-in opportunities for students to share their feedback, something that will also contribute to a stronger acknowledgement of the value placed on the student voice.

An important response to the student voice between 2018/19 and 2021/22 includes the requirement for every student, as part of a suite of induction activities, to participate in a compulsory two-hour 'How to Central' workshop, led by the Director of Learning, Teaching and Inclusion. This event not only introduces students to the School's support services and frameworks (including its Student Code of Conduct), but also supports the promotion of an institutional culture that values all individuals through its intersectional approach to student engagement, behaviour and support. This framework has been designed in consultation with students and staff and reflects Central's status as a specialist institution for the performing arts, which necessitates a collaborative, open, and creative working environment where all members of the community will be placed in relation to each other in ways that can be at times vulnerable and challenging.

Recent developments and interventions in support of student (and staff) wellbeing, include Wellbeing Wednesdays, giving space in the timetable for off-curricula wellbeing activities, led by the SU. This initiative was co-sponsored by the SU President and Vice-Principal (Curriculum & Students) and is being piloted this academic year. Whilst we recognise the value of high-intensity training, the feedback and data on stress and 'burnout', both directly from students to the SU, and from our Student Advice and Support Services, in terms of a significant rise in demand on their services, led to a joint initiative with our Students' Union and student support services to focus on wellbeing at the centre of the student experience. This theme was also explored by our Portfolio Review Panel, who commented on the importance of maintaining the quality of our tradition of training whilst noting the need to develop contemporary solutions to enabling the wellbeing of our students.

3. Student Outcomes

Positive outcomes

Curriculum

Our degree programmes are designed to develop students' core competencies and individual talents as practitioners through deepening their critical engagements with their identities and those of the industries they are preparing to enter. Our degrees each scaffold the skills they need with the approaches to thinking valued in the performing arts today, culminating in practice-based learning opportunities and assessments. Acting students' final year work is presented in three professional-level productions in large- and smaller-scale performance venues, as well as developing the requisite portfolio of headshots, performance reels and networking skills required to launch their careers. BA Contemporary Performance Practice students engage in professional placements, embedded within host organisations across the UK and some internationally, whilst also producing independent research projects which critically engage with issues prevalent in today's society, before reflecting on themselves as practitioners in their final unit. BA Theatre Practice students apply their specialisms through in-house and external professional productions, culminating in a unit focusing on their professional development and career plans for the five years following graduation.

Wrap-around Support

Students' journeys are supported through centralised services provided to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed to their highest levels during their time with us. This includes: a Learning Skills programme to support students in the development of their academic practice (including English as a second language support); advice and guidance on matters such as accommodation, welfare, student finance and general financial matters; a counselling service supplementing the support available to students from the NHS; our Neuro-Inclusion and Disability Service for students with additional learning needs which supports students in getting adjustments to learning and any required additional equipment they can access via the Disabled Students Allowance; our 'Talk to Us' initiative which exists to support students with concerns regarding bullying, harassment and discrimination; and a three-tiered Wellbeing and Fitness to Study Process run in partnership between professional and academic staff which helps us intervene when concerns arise about students' engagement and progress on their degree.

Continuation and completion

Central's metrics demonstrate performance above benchmark (+1.9%) and threshold (+13.1%) for continuation, and also above benchmark (+5.3%) and threshold (+26%) for completion. These outcomes have been achieved through a combination of deliberate measures, including:

- Wellbeing and Support For Study Procedures (Stages 1-3): Close working relationships between student support staff and course teams is crucial to enabling the continuation and completion of our students. Early identification of issues with engaging with learning (such as non-attendance or demonstrably impacted performance) result in initial discussions between course teams and individuals, and escalation through this process facilitates regular check-in points with students continuing to experience difficulties. 56 members of

Central's student body (or about 5% of the total population) accessed its formal Wellbeing procedures in 2021/22, of whom 31 were supported at Stages 2 or 3 – and who were therefore at a higher risk of withdrawing or suspending their studies due to their personal circumstances. Of these, only students subsequently withdrew or suspended their studies, attesting to the effectiveness of the School's intervention mechanisms.

- **Break in Studies** – In some cases, we recognise that the best outcome for students is to take a break from their studies and return to us to provide opportunities to succeed and the best possibility of students achieving as highly as possible. Between 2018/19 and 2021/22, 119 students took 'Breaks in Studies', of whom 97% successfully resumed their studies with us. This speaks to support provided to students before, during, and upon returning from a break.
- **Mitigating Circumstances:** Our mitigating circumstances (MCs) procedures allow students to self-declare issues which have adversely affected their studies. We have seen an increase in the number of students engaging with this process between 2018/19 and 2021/22, aligning with the sector's experience under COVID and amplified in the context of performance and practice-based programmes. During COVID-affected study (March 2020-April 2022), students were supported with our no detriment regulations concerned with 'significant disruption', with COVID-impacted study not requiring the submission of MCs.
- **Students are provided an opportunity to resit failed assessments**, either in the same format or varied approximations of the same environments (depending on whether students are required to recover aspects or full elements of assessment). The comparability in terms of academic standards for these assignments, whether from our existing resit offers or from bespoke assignments, are verified through liaison with external examiners and in the consideration of student outcomes within Examination Board processes.
- **Alternative assessments:** Students are provided with alternative assessment to accommodate arising matters which require adjustments to be made, to replace tasks which cannot be replicated equitably, and to provide students the opportunity to have professional working outcomes (such as working on professional productions) assessed by Central staff in lieu of 'in-house' work.

Progression

Central achieves a progression rate 3.5% below benchmark, but 5.1% above threshold. As a performing arts specialist, it is important to note that performing arts as a subject area by OfS' own calculations is 6.8% below the sector weighted median for progression, and Central is above this level^{viii}. We are broadly in line with benchmark for Year 1 and Year 2, with Year 3 below benchmark. It is notable that the Year 3 cohort were surveyed during September-November 2020 where the impact of the pandemic had a devastating impact on the arts, entertainment and recreation sectors. The arts and entertainment sector saw a 60% decline in output in 2020, with 55% of existing roles furloughed and 68% of the eligible population in the arts, entertainment and recreation sectors claiming under the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme^{ix}.

Based on our Graduate Outcomes Survey data 2017/18-2019/20 – tabulated below - an average 84.4% of all undergraduate respondents were in or about to start employment or further study, with 7.2% unemployed or in unemployment. 89.6% of Acting graduates were in employment or further study, with 48/52 from our 2021 Acting cohort successful in gaining representation from talent

agents in support of their work as actors. 87.6% of Theatre Practice graduates and 93.2% of Contemporary Performance Practice graduates were in employment or further study.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Average
Employment	85.7%	70.8%	80.5%	79.0%
Further study	3.2%	7.5%	5.7%	5.4%
Other	11.1%	21.7%	13.8%	15.6%

Central is justifiably proud of the number of award-winning graduates and alumni who work in the creative industries, the significant numbers of its graduates employed in the theatre profession or in social and applied settings, and the number of change-makers, influencers, mobilisers in their professional fields, working both nationally and internationally, illustrates how the value added by our skills-based training also produces ongoing impacts in the professional sector. Between 2018 and 2022, our alumni team have tracked 289 graduates from our undergraduate provision working in professional theatre (in the UK and internationally), 60 professional engagements in film and 59 in television.

We can highlight the impact and longevity of our graduates in industry through the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO survey), which we use in addition to in-house tracking of graduate engagements. For the years available within the scope of this exercise we see the broadly high performance of our graduates compared with average outcomes for students on the performing arts in tax years 2018/19 and 2019/20:

Year (after graduating)	2018/19 (+5)			2019/20 (+5)			2018/19 (+3)		
Graduates	All	CSSD	+/-	All	CSSD	+/-	All	CSSD	+/-
Sustained employment only	79.9%	78.1%	-1.8%	78.9%	81.6%	2.7%	77.4%	82.5%	5.1%
Sustained employment with or without further study	86.4%	83.9%	-2.5%	84.8%	88.0%	3.2%	85.6%	86.1%	0.5%
Sustained employment, further study or both	87.9%	86.5%	-1.4%	86.7%	89.2%	2.5%	88.0%	88.0%	0.0%
Year (after graduating)	2019/20 (+3)			2018/19 (+1)			2019/20 (+1)		
Graduates	All	CSSD	+/-	All	CSSD	+/-	All	CSSD	+/-
Sustained employment only	76.6%	85.5%	8.9%	69.6%	84.8%	15.2%	67.8%	78.1%	10.3%
Sustained employment with or without further study	83.6%	92.5%	8.9%	83.0%	94.2%	11.2%	80.4%	86.1%	5.7%
Sustained employment, further study or both	86.2%	93.6%	7.4%	88.1%	96.5%	8.4%	85.2%	86.6%	1.4%

4. Educational Gain

Educational gain at Central is characterised by our students' readiness upon graduation to enter professional employment in their chosen industries or career sectors. We intend our students to have career-strengthened longevity as high-quality practitioners, directly as a result of our high intensity training, low student-staff ratios, professional standard facilities, and industry engagement and access are all hallmarks of our provision, and support students in achieving their aims.

Graduates' readiness to enter professions and careers is across both the traditional 'West End' theatre productions, small-scale touring companies, off-West End and regional theatres and arts organisations and in allied and related (often third sector) applied theatre and educational settings. Central, as with other English HE providers, accepts and admits students to its degrees on the basis that they will be able to achieve successful outcomes from their studies. Through our admissions processes, we identify candidates not only with the academic ability to succeed but with the capacity to develop the skills, practices and behaviours needed to succeed in our related industries after graduation. This means that whilst students arrive with a range of previous experience in the performing arts, particularly given the reducing breadth of this provision in pre-tertiary education, they are supported and enabled to benefit from our inclusive training and delivery.

Central, as a small-specialist provider, continues to develop its approach to data-led and evidence-based review of educational gain. With our comparatively small student population(s), we are vigilant about the impact that numerical changes can have in terms of our overall profile (and how this impacts on proportions for and across cohorts), and engage in nuanced conversations with academic teams and other stakeholders to ensure that context and individuality remain at the core of our approach to supporting students and evaluating our success in supporting students from all backgrounds to succeed in and gain from their studies. Examples of this developing approach to evaluating educational gain include the monitoring of student entry profiles, reviewing student degree attainment (including differential attainment), alongside the use of attendance data to monitor and sustain ongoing learner engagement.

Academic Development

Whilst Central's core activity is practical theatre and performing arts training, we are committed to ensuring our students achieve an inclusive and rounded education, equipping them with the subject-specific and transferable skills necessary to build and maintain rewarding careers with longevity. As many graduates go on to portfolio careers where they will often be self-employed, we work to build our curricula to support and develop all of these skills. Rather than considering transferable or generic graduate skills alongside the core practical arts curricula, we braid their development through and in context – specific and bespoke to their needs. Thus, skills such as critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, academic writing, and research and referencing skills are developed in context and germane to their disciplinary studies. In addition, all students are supported by Central's Learning Skills programme,

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Skills team has run group sessions for over 650 students on topics ranging from academic writing and structuring an essay, to time management and planning assignments. It also runs one-to-one sessions with undergraduate students on critical reading, English for Academic Purposes, writing to word limits, and how to implement feedback.

Performing arts programmes naturally lend themselves to the development of valuable personal development skills, with the demands of intensive, collaborative training necessitating students build and develop their resilience, motivation, confidence, communication, presentation, time management, networking and interpersonal skills. Assessment activity is designed to challenge and reward students' engagement in both the core practical skills of their chosen discipline, and the development of allied and essential employability skills. Teamworking is inherent in

professional-standard public productions, outreach and project work, and cross-programme collaboration.

Embedding entrepreneurial skills into the curriculum has received significant focus and investment at Central. In 2018-19 we ran quarterly enterprise sessions designed to lead students through the core principles of business start-up and entrepreneurship, reaching over 150 students. These culminated in an opportunity to bid for a start-up award at the end of each year to fund graduate enterprises.

In 2020, Central successfully co-bid with the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) and University of the Arts London (UAL) to establish a StART Enterprise and Entrepreneurship project, receiving a grant of £900,000 from the Office for Students and Research England. The project enriched the entrepreneurial training provided at each institution via new and enhanced tuition and a range of knowledge exchange activities. These included student workshops between Central, RNCM, and UAL and professional placements, mentorships, and networking opportunities with partner organisations across the creative industries sector, helping students to develop the necessary skills and real-world experience to build successful and sustainable careers. The project resulted in significant knowledge exchange, and educational gain for students across all three institutions. At Central these included the delivery of 31 workshops and other enterprise focussed events resulting in 2,449 student hours of additional learning. These included schoolwide workshops as well as sessions tailored to specific taught programmes. There were 72 applications to Central's enterprise awards scheme between 2020-22 with a total of £30,000 awarded to new graduate start-ups. The project also resulted in 152 offers of in-kind support for graduating entrepreneurs from Central alumni now working in the industry and the production of 19 entrepreneurship tool kits which are now available to current and future students.

Central's most recent Higher Education Business and Community Interaction HESA submission shows that this investment in entrepreneurship skills and opportunities for students has reaped dividends for graduate start-ups. Across the two years 2020-22 Central graduates registered 50 new companies, attracting £481,000 of external investment, and creating a turn-over of £1,286,000. The number of active companies established over the preceding three years counts 45, with a total of 161 (FTE) active employees in these new and established business start-ups.

Undergraduate Degree Outcomes

Our degree outcomes profile - verified as meeting English and UK-wide sector expectations and thresholds for academic standards consistently by all external examiners - evidence the high levels of success our approach enables students to achieve:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	4-year
'Good Honours'	90%	91%	95%	84%	90%
First Class Class	32%	36%	44%	36%	38%
Upper Second Class	58%	55%	50%	48%	52%
Lower Second Class	8%	8%	5%	11%	8%
Third Class	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Students (rounded to 5)	155	140	220	220	735

During this time, as the School has further strengthened the relationship between inclusion and learning, teaching and assessment, we have seen the attainment gap between White and BME students reduced to the extent where BME have achieved better than White-defining students for the last two academic years (+0.7% and +5.2% respectively). Our students with declared disabilities still achieve approximately 4% fewer good honours than those with no declared disabilities, however the numbers of students with declared disabilities has more than doubled over four years. 2021/22 was the first year where Home students achieved better than their EU and Overseas counterparts (representing an average 20-26% of undergraduate student body) who were impacted significantly by three COVID-affected years of delivery (during which many were studying in their own countries and resultantly their own time zones).

Internal Assurance and Enhancement

Our offer for educational gain is reviewed within our normal quality assurance and enhancement processes. We have increasingly focused our annual monitoring processes on risk-based discussions, using student data alongside external examiner judgments and student feedback to identify where interventions need to take place. This means that, between Academic Registry and our Faculty Office, should academic performance vary substantially we can enter into informed conversations with course teams to identify the wider challenges and development needs of our students. Examples include annual review of our Library induction and support for students' development of their academic writing and referencing skills. During periodic review or revalidation, these themes are drawn out in more depth and discussed with course teams and students to ensure appropriate course- and institutional-based support is in place.

Case Study: Placements and Work-Based Learning

A key example of the educational gains for our students from studying at Central is the provision of placement opportunities. The close working relationships of our academic staff with and within industry enable us to provide placements in a range of arts and educational settings in London, the UK and internationally.

Placements are built into the curriculum of our Contemporary Performance Practice and Theatre Practice degrees. Within Drama, Applied Theatre and Education, students develop and solidify their working practice through staged phases of activity which sees them transition from working in schools and community projects to professional work environments in their third year, such as charities, social enterprises and arts companies. Second year students have been placed in 54 schools over the past four years as part of their Pedagogies in Practice learning (with a focus on engaging with concepts of theatre and pedagogy and considering what it means to learn through theatre-making). A further 57 group projects have run in the summer term of second year, ranging from schools to childhood trauma support groups to HIV and AIDS charities (working in small groups to provide applied theatre projects). 228 students have completed professional placements in their third year (working in a more sustained way in a professional applied theatre context) between 2018/19 and 2021/22. Our third year Writing for Performance students undertake a residency, learning about different models of writing residencies and considering how writers in different contexts respond to those they write for and/or with as well as the impact of commissioning and national funding priorities. Students have resided in 59 different professional contexts during this period.

Our placements provision for Contemporary Performance Practice has benefitted from funding from the Leverhulme trust, enabling these students to apply for project funding. In 2021/22 alone, 48 second and third year students secured funding totalling £75k which enabled projects to take place in New York, Oxford, Birmingham, Manchester, India and South Africa. Feedback from a group of students who went to South Africa typifies the importance of our placement activities, noting: *“This will help the entire group in the future, understanding what it means to communicate successfully and be resilient when the work gets complicated. We all learnt the importance of adapting to last minute changes and to being in a completely unfamiliar environment, understanding flexibility and navigating a work/life balance- all fundamental skills we will need in our future as young artists/facilitators”*.

Theatre Practice students in their third year are able to work on professional productions outside of Central to gain real-world experience and apply the skills they have developed on a range of in-house productions within the industry. 92 Theatre Practice students have been involved in placements over the past three academic years (since we centralised placements monitoring), working in contexts including: other drama schools, major London theatres, UK-based theatre companies and museums.

We proactively support our acting students, when successful in gaining professional working opportunities during their studies, to be assessed on their performance in lieu of their involvement in in-house public productions. These alternative assessments, approved by our course teams on an individual basis and with external examiner oversight, retain the rigour of assessed academic work, whilst recognising and celebrating the success of our soon-to-be graduates in already securing professional engagements.

5. References

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- ⁱ The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama's Strategic Plan 2021-2023, available at: <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/about-central/centrals-strategic-plan-2021-2023>
- ⁱⁱ Equity and Inclusion at Central 2021-23 Action Plan, available at: <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/about-central/equity-at-central>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Federation of Drama Schools, Core Principles for Training, available at <https://www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk/assets/pages/fds2-core-principles.pdf>
- ^{iv} Conservatoires UK Best Practice, available at: <https://conservatoiresuk.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CUK-best-practice-FINAL-.pdf>
- ^v Made at Uni, 100+ ways universities have improved everyday life, available at <https://madeatuni.org.uk/breakthroughs>
- ^{vi} Further details of the facilities and resources on offer to students at Central can be found at: <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/Life-at-Central/Why-Choose-Central/facilities> (facilities); <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/Life-at-Central/student-support> (student support); <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/Life-at-Central/Learning-at-Central/technical-support> (technical support).
- ^{vii} Student Support Services Annual Summary 21/22, November 2022. Unpublished. Held in Central's Document Management System.
- ^{viii} Office for Students – Setting Numerical Thresholds for Condition B3, available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/setting-numerical-thresholds-for-condition-b3/> (page 41).
- ^{ix} Research Briefing on Covid-19 and the arts and culture sectors, available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9018/>