

## **Royal Central School of Speech and Drama student submission**

### **1. Approach to evidence-gathering**

We are the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (Central) Students' Union (also referred to as Central Students' Union). We have a president, who is the only sabbatical officer, all other officers are current students, these include a vice-president, events officer, inclusion officer, undergraduate officer and a postgraduate officer. We then have a Technical Support Officer which is an unelected role. We also have a part-time support officer who is an independent staff member. The support officer has been here for 5 years and is the only person that is consistent each year. As the students' union, we represent the student voice at many committees and meetings, arrange events both on campus and in the students' union bar, we provide support for students, and the president and post-graduate officer sit on the board of governors. We also lead a group of inclusion reps, who nominate themselves to represent a specific community. These are the students we then look to when we need representation from a person in a specific community. As a union, we are integrated into the school and are considered in every decision made.

Evidence collecting was taken from all three undergraduate BA courses, Contemporary Performance Practice, Acting and Theatre Practice. For this submission, we have used pre-existing and new evidence. The pre-existing evidence consists of feedback from course committees. Course committee is made up of one to three members of each course, from every year, and course leaders. The student union president is also in attendance. These meetings happen once a term and every course has them. Course committee is a way to collect course related feedback from students, with the correct people present who can help solutions happen. The evidence used from course committees was minutes from meetings ranging from 2019-2022. We also used past surveys that had been sent out via email and the students' union newsletter. The first survey was created in 2021 and had 25 respondents. Another is one created in September 2022 and has 13 responses. We also use comments made to us in previous student council meetings as evidence. Extra-evidence gathering happened for the submission. There are 664 undergraduate students at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and the overall engagement for our extra-evidence collecting makes up around 13.25% of the student population. Of these students, 46.59% of that feedback comes from past and current Contemporary Performance Practice students, with 20.45% coming from past and current Theatre Practice students and the other 13.64% coming from current acting students. 19.31% of these responses are unknown due to anonymous answers. There was a working group created, made up of all six students' union officers and two 2022 graduates. All members of this working group are from the Contemporary Performance Practice course. This group met weekly for three weeks and on the fourth week read and signed off the submission. We conducted a survey of which 33 students responded, 28% being from Contemporary performance practise, 17% being from Acting, 25% being from Theatre Practice 28% being unknown due to anonymous answers. This survey was promoted on Instagram. We also did social media polls to gather evidence, which collected evidence from 88 students on a range of courses.

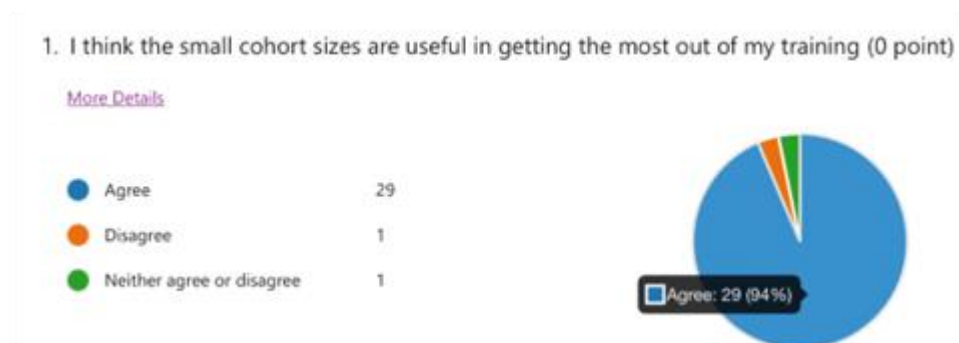
As the students' union, we engaged with the school at the start of the process and received advice from them on evidence collecting. I received a copy of the school's submission draft and sent the school a copy of the student submission draft. Data from NUS surveys were shared. The content of the student submission was not influenced by the school in any way.

The submission has been written by the Student Union president, with feedback on the submission draft given by student union officers and recent graduates. The overall engagement for the evidence collecting wasn't balanced between courses, with the BA Contemporary Performance Practice course being over-represented and BA Acting females being massively underrepresented. Therefore, these results don't necessarily reflect the view of all undergraduate students at Central.

## 2. Student experience

It is important to note, many students we spoke to in our evidence gathering felt the effects of the coronavirus pandemic in their training, and therefore have admitted this affected their overall view and experience at Central. Whilst, in a working group consisting of Contemporary Performance Practice students all from a British background, most students expressed their original concern on the ability of Central's courses being able to transfer online. Although most said they found the lessons online less effective and engaging, students expressed that they thought Central did a successful job at turning the course content into content that could be done online, without disrupting students' learning.

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama being a drama school means our students get a different experience than those students at traditional universities. A day for a student at Central can start at 8:30am and finish at 6pm, meaning the students spend most of their three years of training with their teachers, classmates and in the building. Cohort sizes at Central are typically smaller, and 94% of students in our social media poll said they thought this was beneficial to their training. 31 students out of the 664 undergraduate students answered this poll and they came evenly from across the three undergraduate courses.



We found students felt the smaller classes and time spent with teachers created a community within Central. In a social media poll where we received 84 responses, 54 students said they felt a part of a community at Central. These responses were from students spread evenly across the three undergraduate courses, with a slight misrepresentation from female actors. A few direct quotes related to this are below.

'It helps you to get to know the teachers and your classmates, and therefore we can feel comfortable in letting ourselves go and putting our all into our training.' – BA Acting student

'It allows a closer working relationship/more ability to network and 1on1 support from lecturers'- BA Acting student

'For theatre practice (backstage disciplines), this allows tutors/lecturers to get to know students well and know the path they want to go down'- BA Theatre production

'The small cohort sizes allow everyone to be seen and heard'- Acting student

'My year has 14 and it feels like we get the individual attention we need'- Theatre production student

'Small sizes are excellent to have precise and specific work and learning'– Acting student

'I think we get more personal time with the teachers, and it feels like each student matters. More quality teaching comes from this.'- Contemporary Performance Practise student.

On this survey, students on the Contemporary Performance Practise course stated that they wish their cohort was smaller due to seeing the success of the small classes on the Acting and Theatre Practise courses.

Throughout students' time at Central the range of learning environments and styles varies massively, and this was noted in the working group. The working group discussed the range of learning and training styles that students have at Central, including placement, lectures, rehearsals and workshops. In a survey, which 59 students responded, 28% being from Contemporary performance practise, 17% being from Acting, 25% being from Theatre Practise and 30% being unknown due to

anonymous answers, 88% of students agreed that this variety was beneficial to their learning. One student on the Contemporary Performance Practise course,




‘All the different places of learning are useful in making us diverse workers. The placements show you the real world but also show you what options there are for after studies, it widened the possibilities that could come out of the course. We learn practically, placements and in rehearsals so we see it from every angle’.

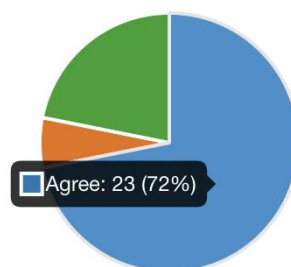
Our survey asked students whether they thought Visiting Lecturers and Visiting Professionals added useful knowledge and expertise to their training, in which 72% of students agreed was correct. These responses consisted of 32 students’ responses, 28% being from Contemporary performance practise, 17% being from Acting, 25% being from Theatre Practise and 28% being unknown due to anonymous answers.

5. I feel visiting lectures and visiting professionals add useful knowledge and expertise to my training

[More Details](#)

 Insights

 Agree	23
 Disagree	2
 Neither agree or disagree	7



The working group, made up of only Contemporary Performance Practise students and who are all elected student union officers, also discussed visiting lectures and visiting professionals, to which one stated

‘There’s a massive range of people coming in to teach and direct, it gives you networking opportunities and an insight into what goes on in the industry. Also, they don’t know you, so you are treated more of a professional rather than a student.’

This evidence suggests students believe visiting lecturers and visiting professionals play a key part in students transition from their training to the professional world.

We looked at a survey created in 2021 about assessment and feedback. There were 25 responses, with 13 of these being Contemporary Performance Practise students, 9 being Theatre Practise students and 3 being unknown due to them not declaring their course. On this survey, it was found that 72% of students thought it would be useful if feedback was given earlier, 60% of students said the last feedback they received wasn’t on time, however 52% of students said normally their feedback for assessments is on time.

In the working group, we discussed these results and all students agreed that the quality of the feedback is good and helpful in developing students training and practise. This only came from Contemporary Performance Practice students.

One of the elected Contemporary Performance Practise course representatives stated ‘Verbal feedback is useful from teachers, and they also help us develop the skills to give each other and our own work feedback.’

On a social media poll, one student from the Contemporary Performance Practise course stated;

“The detailed feedback on every essay/project/work is one of the best things central does’

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Since this survey, the expected time for feedback and assessment results has been shortened from 6 weeks to 4 weeks.

A reoccurring theme in both the surveys and the working group was support for neurodivergent students. As 32% of students at Central have declared themselves as being neurodiverse or disabled, the support on offer to students is important. In a social media poll where 51 students responded, 30 of them agreed that they feel supported with their neurodiversity or disability. A student who is apart of the neurodiverse community commented;

'The advise and techniques I have been shown in my 1 to1 dyslexia tutorials are ones I will carry with me throughout the rest of my career.'

In the 2021-2022 academic year, 22 students did a full diagnostic assessment at Central and were diagnosed with a neurodiversity.

### 3. Student Outcomes

In addition to the course content that each course offers, it was noted by multiple students how successful Central is in educating students in diversity and inclusion, especially in relation to the theatre and performing arts industry. Central offers mandatory training to all students and staff in consent, anti-racism and have said they are working on antisemitism and other trainings. One Contemporary Performance Practise course representative in our survey said;

'The accessibility training, we get filters into my whole life'

All members of the working group agreed that the training and conversations about diversity and inclusion is something that they will take with them in both their careers and daily lives. It was discussed that this is useful for students to learn in their training as the theatre and performing arts industry is forever evolving and changing, and the people who are going to be apart of it need to know how to accept and embrace the changes.

When we asked students whether they felt Central prepared them for the industry, out of 88 responses, exactly 50% agreed. All students on BA Acting who answered agreed, Technical Theatre had more than half of them agreeing, whereas the amount of Contemporary Performance Practise students who agreed was much less. This may be because the range of jobs graduates of Contemporary Performance Practise go in to is much larger, and therefore it would be harder to prepare students for all jobs. The aim of the Acting and Theatre Practice courses are more defined, and therefore it's easier to judge if students feel prepared for the job.

Also noted by students was how successful Central is at encouraging individual growth. One Contemporary Performance Practise student stated;

'Encourages students to be proactive in making their own work. Not being micromanaged'

Another student from the Theatre Practise course said;

'Central takes care of individual talent although there are a lot of students'.

In a survey where 50 students answered, 66% agreed that they felt supported by Central in creating their own art and practise as an individual. Most of these answers came from Contemporary Performance Practise with less coming from Acting.

When in conversation with two graduates of the Contemporary Performance Practise course, it was noted that Central makes graduates feel apart of the community even after they have graduated. Central have alumni ID cards for graduates which gives them access to the library, and also offer discounted rates of hiring studio spaces. Academic staff are also consistent in sending

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job opportunities and recommending students for jobs. It was discussed that these details provide comfort to graduates when they are in the industry.

Data from the graduate outcome survey suggests that the average percentage of graduates in employment is 79%, with 5.4% being in further study. Although these results are high, when discussing this, students in the working group mentioned how it wasn't as easy to judge drama school graduates going into the theatre and art industry as many people will be self-employed and many graduates take a while to find a job and their place in the industry.