

Trinity Laban Student TEF submission

This report aims to represent the diverse voices of all students in an unbiased manner. The student perspective has been gathered in a range of different settings, including committee meetings, small focus groups, programme seminars as well as individual conversations and interviews. The information provided has been mostly collated through semi-structured interviews, whereby offering structure in the form of a topic made students comfortable to share their experiences without veering too far off course. Open form interviews have encouraged conversations where the students have brought new topics to the table.

Contacting the graduated cohort was key in this research to gather a retrospective look on their studies and Time at Trinity Laban. Alumni have consistently reported that they are able to provide a more panoramic picture of their experience at TL than that provided at the time of taking the National Student Survey submission, which lands in the middle of a very difficult and stressful academic period.

Throughout this report the student voice is used to explain and expand on the results of the National Student Survey to provide a more vivid picture.

COVID

It is important to acknowledge that the past three years which are encapsulated in the TEF have been tainted by the effects of COVID-19. The recent Musical Theatre and Dance graduates have experienced COVID-19 restrictions throughout the whole duration of their training, and Music graduates have been affected by the pandemic for three of their four years of study. The pandemic has affected practical courses, and Trinity Laban has had to go through great lengths to be able to accommodate restriction within the practical training of their students. Trinity Laban has been very pliable and fast learning, and has embraced change from the beginning of the pandemic. Students did not receive lessons for the last two weeks of spring term in March 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic. This is an incredible figure in comparison to other practical courses around the globe, where training was null. TL students and alumni appreciate the efforts that the institution has gone through to ensure the continuation of learning. Despite all the efforts, the results have not always been positive, and students have been left frustrated at the lack of opportunities that have been available.

Teaching

Students across all faculties, programmes and years have repeatedly reported being content and satisfied with the teaching at Trinity Laban. Students feel most strongly towards teachers that are a first point of contact, with a special mention to those teachers who immerse themselves in their students education, really allowing them to nurture their craft. This is particularly prevalent in the music faculty, where students' biggest praises lie on their one-to-one lessons, some claiming that "teachers go above and beyond their duties" to ensure their learning. This satisfaction also extends to Musical Theatre students, and their one-to-one singing classes, even though they would like this module to have more contact hours.

It is commonly known that practitioners, performers, and creators are not always the best teachers, as being highly skilled in your craft does not automatically grant you the skill to share it with others. It is important to mention that the quality of the teaching at Trinity Laban is of very high standards. Students feel inspired by teachers, especially those who are actively researching their practice, are passionate about sharing their craft, and question their communication skills and resources when it comes to teaching their craft.

Most students across all disciplines enjoy and are inspired by their lecturers being active professionals in the industry within their fields. Dancers and Musical Theatre students are particularly keen on their teachers having different and varied specialities and backgrounds, as they claim having different explanations to similar movement patterns to be “particularly helpful when trying to grasp certain intangible concepts”. Despite this, most dance students are not satisfied with the range, quantity or level of technical training, as they deem it insufficient to translate to their dance practice and performance. Most dance undergraduates deem 3 ballet classes a week to be insufficient and Cunningham technique for 3 years to be obsolete, and have continuously emphasised the lack of range and currency in techniques being taught. This is an ongoing request that students have raised for over four years, and Trinity Laban is starting to find ways of bringing in different artists and updating the range of techniques provided. For instance, Hip Hop is now being introduced as a technique into the curriculum, and during October 2021, Ba3 students were offered a 4 day long immersive Gaga Lab, as an addition to their training. Trinity Laban is also reviewing its undergraduate dance course, and involving students in this process, to allow more freedom to shift technical classes to those that might be more relevant at a given point in time. Similarly, in the Musical theatre department, students are keen to receive a wider range of experiences and classes to increase their versatility and skill ability.

Recent dance graduates and BA3s, have suggested that technique groups are too large, which affects the amount of feedback they receive. In a dance technique setting the teacher gives both group and individual corrections and comments to suggest improvements and cue changes. Undergraduate students tend to focus on the individual corrections and can forget to take into account and apply correction directed to the group. It is important to note that dance students do receive a lot of feedback in the latter form, however might not recognise that the feedback is directed to them as well. Dancers that trained through the pandemic – current Ba3s and recent graduates – experienced smaller groups as a measure to socially distance in the periods where this was a requirement. Inherently, these cohorts had the chance to work in closer relationship with the teachers, in groups of ten to fifteen. During this period, feedback became more individual.

There is a general appraisal across faculties in regards to most teachers being external. This usually means that they are self-employed, and work as freelance artists, where they are not bound to an institution and to an institution's ways. Bringing in industry professionals in their prime is heavily celebrated, however, this can bring some problems. A large number of students claim that a lack of unification in procedures amongst the teaching body can bring a level of disorganisation. The institution is actively trying new and different ways of communicating with both students and staff, aiming to increase efficacy, clarity and precision of information divulged. For example, Trinity Laban is working towards a “you-said-this, we-did-that” campaign to increase awareness amongst staff and students of institutional changes.

A large number of music students believe that the relationship with their one-to-one teachers can have a significant impact on their careers further to their studies at Trinity Laban. Some students do not feel comfortable approaching a small number of teachers and programme leaders about their

studies or career related matters in fear that the teacher might retaliate against them. Despite the institution's earnest efforts to eradicate favouritism and create an atmosphere of equality, some students have disclosed to struggle with these dynamics. In these instances, students are encouraged to report the issue to a teacher, programme leader or member of the management team that the student feels comfortable with, so that the matter can be further investigated. Even though this might be happening in a small scale, Trinity Laban is working towards resolving this issue.

Students' attitudes towards Trinity Laban's USP

Trinity Laban is London's creative conservatoire, and students feel blessed to be in a place with such diversity, whether this is cultural, social, technical, or disciplinary. Students appraise the Trinity Laban atmosphere for being inviting and allowing space for creation to happen, as well as learning from each other. This space and time really allows students to reach out for their own learning in order to make the most out of their training. It is up to the student to go the extra mile to acquire that information, allowing space for research and early specialisation. London is a multicultural hub, and creates the perfect location for the Trinity Laban student to reach out to their interests and use their training alongside their environment to shape themselves. Students feel privileged to be in such environment that creates artist with prominent levels of adaptability, and ability to mould to different scenarios, situations, and events. This is a trait that makes the Trinity Laban graduate very employable. It is because of this atmosphere, and diversity that some students have transferred from other music conservatoires such as Royal Academy of Music.

The institution prides itself on its collaborative nature, and once a year Trinity Laban celebrates the COLAB fortnight, where more than 80 projects run simultaneously. With the aim of collaboration, students from disciplines mix together over the period of two weeks to explore and play together. Students have felt that these two weeks are not sufficient to establish the collaborative experience that they desire. There is a frustration amongst the student body about the lack of cross-pollination culture amongst faculties, as the only mixing encouraged by the institution happens solely during COLAB. Each building is heavily imprinted by the discipline which it hosts, and most students feel uncomfortable entering buildings of the rest of disciplines. Trinity Laban is currently changing and redeveloping programmes so there is more cross faculty integration, whereby after revalidation there will be an optative collaboration module that runs across the different faculties. This, alongside bringing back the cross faculty mingling activities during induction, will hopefully establish a more collaborative atmosphere from the beginning of the students courses, which might be carried through the duration of their studies at Trinity Laban.

Cultural differences and satisfaction.

International dance students, especially those with a European background, tend to be less satisfied with the technical training levels at the conservatoire than UK students. When asked, international students have said that "an international student usually sacrifices more to be doing a course abroad", emphasising that it is "emotionally harder, as there are many hardships with finding yourself alone in a different country and having to be completely self-reliant, with minimal family support". Studying abroad usually also comes at a greater economical cost, especially now, with the

effects that Brexit has had on EU students' fees. These greater efforts is creating greater expectations of the course and programmes, and international students are usually more demanding within their courses.

Cultural differences in training and upbringing also cause a big rift in opinions between UK based and international based students. More often than not, international students are more technically proficient than homegrown students. Dance schools and young dancers' programmes at international venues tend to discipline the dancer greater than those dancers that join Trinity Laban from the UK. This is changing because of Brexit, and Trinity Laban will continue to see a shift in the diversity and background of students, which will continue to change the dynamic of the students at Trinity Laban.

The differences within the satisfaction of international and home students in the music faculty have the same underlying themes, however not as prominent, given the reduced contact hours in comparison to dance students.

Tactile feedback in the dance faculty.

Corrections made with the use of touch is something that has been a bit of a grey area in the dance industry over the past few years. It is important to note that students feel very respected in this regard. COVID has brought a greater awareness towards tactile feedback, partially due to the transmissive nature of COVID. The institution has been very persistent in training the teachers to ask if the students would allow this form of feedback. Recent dance graduates have experienced and speak highly of this shift, claiming that "it has created a safe space" in the dance class.

Staff and Support

Students deem learning support very high in quality. This feedback is both from international students where English is not the first language, and disabled students. Students feel supported and the feedback received allows them to work on their project and further their research without imposing a specific view. They find very helpful the different means that the learning support is provided, including; corrections and even meetings to talk through the students' thought process. The students deem that student support allows them to harness learning skills for writing, project managing, researching, questioning, and evaluating their work or other's works. Creating a system for the students to develop their academic practices. However, the highly demanded learning support team is exceedingly small and only works in the institution part time. Despite the team's commitment to all the students and high volume of students reaching out for extra academic support for their independent research projects, the learning support team cannot keep up in the assessment periods, as it is under a lot of strain.

In terms of support, one of the most loved departments by the student body is the counselling service that TL offers. Currently 25% of students cross-faculty are receiving counselling from several different external counsellors that are not attached to the institution. The counselling team have been able to support students in complicated situations as well as referred them to other external services when this has been appropriate. Despite their impeccable job and the high student

satisfaction with this service, there is a great dissatisfaction with the waiting time for the initial response. The demand for this service is enormous, and although the counselling team has grown and improved in the recent years, so has the demand. It is unclear whether the increased demand has sparked from a greater unhappiness, or a greater willingness to speak up, however, COVID has had an impact on the number of students seeking this service. Overall, students claim that this service has positively affected their studies and their ability to engage with their courses, and their student experience at the conservatoire. This is only bound to increase by the recruitment of the new position of mental health advisor, who speaks to those students that might need a little extra support.

Students have claimed to be frustrated with the communication between different departments and students. Mismatched information, or not providing the reasons for changes in procedures has risen frustration amongst students. Information communicated to students from Student Services, Registry and Academic Administration has not always been consistent or specific, and has at times left students disorientated, as they claim they are not always sure who to turn to. This is not helped by the difficult navigation of the institution's online portal, where it is hard to find the correct documents a student might be looking for. For example, unspecific but strict reinforcement of attendance policy has left BA3 dance students disorientated, and unhappy with the communication skills from the institution towards the students. This is however being battled by bringing different people from the institution to speak at the year group seminars, disseminating and clearing up information. At times this has made students feel like the institution is treating them like a number rather than a person. In the music faculty this lack of communication towards the students can also be seen as for example the "brass students were told on a Friday about a following Wednesday eve masterclass despite the guests being from the US, so the event had to be planned in advance". This is not the only instance or department this has happened to, and students cannot drop their work on such short notice to attend a compulsory masterclass. These issues can, however, be resolved before any information is shared to the students, by setting more proficient channels of communication across the different departments, and unifying and simplifying the channel of communication to students.

Dance students feel rather supported by the TL Health team, and appreciate the teams' commitment and investment in injury prevention and recovery. Students are thankful of the wideranging free classes that this service offers. Despite the great quality in service, most students find the treatments unattainable. Because of high prices, students are not seeking treatment as often as they should, which can aggravate injuries. Although prices are high, there is always a waiting list of up to 3 weeks, as there are not enough treatment slots available, which is increasing the students likelihood of injury, and preventing them from progressing in their training. The stress in these services has been recognised and in the past 3 years a triage system has been put in place, where a treatment therapist offers 10 minutes of guidance for fresh injuries. This is allowing some stress to be dissipated from the physiotherapy team, as students are now being directed towards the most suitable service for them, reducing backlog.

Perhaps more work needs to be done in approaching the music faculty, and facilitating the musicians with this physical health. Work is being done in this regard, and workshops are being organised to take place in early 2023 in the music faculty to ensure musicians understand their bodies, and prevent injuries. Music students have been increasingly active with the TL health department in the past year, however a high number of music students are unaware of the existence of this particular service, or that it is not dance specific, and available to all students.

Facilities

Although the facilities in each faculty have been tailored to the specific needs of the disciplines they host, students have felt unsatisfied with different aspects of those facilities. For example, the lift at KCC was out of order for a significant part of the year. This caused great disturbances in the studies of some differently abled students or wheelchair users who could not attend classes, or their designated rehearsal space due to the constraints imposed by the. Music students understand that it is not easy getting things fixed or approved in a historical building such as King Charles Court, however this is affecting their chances and possibilities as students, as it has caused disturbances in their studies. Students with disabilities that have needed to use the lifts have felt neglected, negatively affecting their student experience. This feeling has only been furthered by poor management of lifts that require keys, and wheelchair users not being able to access them to use communal spaces.

Room bookings

There is an ongoing issue and dissatisfaction amongst students with booking rooms at the music faculty. Currently, only the person that has booked the room is allowed to enter the room by tapping their access card. Sometimes the student or teacher that has booked a room, never shows up and doesn't use the room. Students can see through the window that the rooms are empty, however, they cannot enter the room to practice. This brings a constant ambience of frustration to the music faculty, especially during busy assessment or performance season, as anxiety levels increase. Perhaps a better or different booking system in which space can be distributed in a way that maximises its usage might decrease the faculty's already limited space capacity.

Student as part of an institution

A conservatoire setting is vastly different to that of a university, where the student dynamic often displays more self-focused tendencies towards their respective crafts and studies. This alongside a smaller number of students than in a university, can at times make it hard for students to engage with other activities unrelated to their course, e.g. those run by the Students Union. The students' central focus approach can at times create separation between the different courses, and students have reported at times to feeling isolated from the rest of the conservatoire. Those students enrolled in smaller or newer programmes have at times felt forgotten.

Perhaps minor issues with easy fixes go unnoticed in smaller programmes, as there is a smaller percentage of student body asking for change.

Programme

According to the NSS, most Students do not feel fully satisfied with their courses or programmes. This is partly due to the nature of the course, and therefore the type of people the different programme attracts. Artists have more perfectionist tendencies than those non-artist equivalent. The reasoning behind the pursue of an artistic career is very much passion driven, as these careers often involve a high level of commitment and long and odd hours without a very good or regular pay. This concoction creates a very driven and focused individual, one that is generally demanding of oneself and its craft. Perhaps these tendencies underlined by students drive the students to want more of their courses. More teaching time, more projects, more engagement, more practice time, more time in the facilities, more technique, more range, and diversity, as well as more focused. Perhaps tweaks to certain aspects of the course and approach can easily fix the dissatisfaction that seems to loom over the heads of students and that perhaps can cloud all the positive aspects that they might feel in regards to Trinity Laban. Having said this, it is important to note that students do not feel that Trinity Laban has provided what it promised on the brochure. For music students this comes in the form of lack of consistency in weekly classes as advertised on the TL website, and for dance students this comes in the form of lack of performance opportunities and lack of diverse technical approaches, or relevant and current technical practices.

Musical Theatre department

Musical Theatre students are a very interesting cohort to look at in this regard, as they are mostly happy with the programme itself, and it is other things surrounding the programme that the students are less enthused with. The programme at musical theatre is a small department, and the tight-knit quality that a small programme in a small space creates, brings a very special energy to the institution. It is perhaps the facilities that concern these students the most, as the programme at musical theatre is a small department in a small building away from the other bigger departments and buildings. This is creating a sense of neglect, as perhaps all the facilities that the other faculty buildings do have are not to the disposition of the Musical Theatre Students in such immediacy. For example, their subject specific books are in the libraries in the other two buildings, and they are the only student cohort without a library at their disposition. Musical theatre students are part of the music faculty, however their discipline is very different, and the needs of this students are very dispar from those of the music faculty and often feel neglected by the music faculty. This feeling is furthered by the dancers ability to book rooms at Laurie Grove, the musical theatre building, but the musical theatre students are not able to book rooms at the Laban building so they don't damage the Laban dance floors by using tap shoes. Despite this, musical theatre students have nothing but appraisal about their course, studies and time at Trinity Laban. Musical Theatre students would appreciate being contacted and approached directly as their own entity that has different needs to any other music department.

Recent Graduates looking back

Recent graduates feel confident in their creativity and resourcefulness; however they feel technically underprepared in a range of techniques in dance, range in repertory in music and dance and skill

ability and grasp of techniques. Due to COVID-19, there have been a diminished amount of possibilities in which artist have been able to perform. Dancers and musical theatre students have been particularly affected by this lack of performance opportunities and perhaps feel less prepared to enter the performing industry. Recent graduates feel quite confident with collaboration and embrace working in this way, however, are very scared about the uncertainties of the future. Trinity Laban music graduates are usually hired to cover whether this is in pits or elsewhere, as TL creates a very resourceful, quick on their feet and versatile musician. Trinity Laban dance graduates have very wide-ranging careers. Quite a lot of them have moved on to pursue further courses in dance, however, do also dabble in small freelance projects within a very widespan, including work being shown in exhibitions, and festivals. Trinity Laban creates a resourceful artist that can have a very wide and open career. It doesn't create a type of artist, but an independent person who can think for themselves develop for themselves and be able to choose how to implement their education into their career.