

TEF Submission 2023

1. Provider context



The National Centre for Circus Arts ('the National Centre' or 'NCCA') is a registered charity and one of Europe's leading providers of circus education. Based in a magnificent Victorian power station adjacent to Hoxton Square in London, we involve thousands of people in the creation and performance of circus arts every year.

Our diverse range of work includes a BA Hons degree in Circus Arts, a structured progressive training programme for under 18s and professional development opportunities for aspiring and established performers. We offer over 30 recreational classes attended by up to 900 adults and young people per week, and have over 350 professional circus artists who use our facilities as part of our Open Training membership. We also provide workshops and away days for the business community.

NCCA offers only two, connected, Higher Education courses:

Programme	Current Student Numbers
Foundation Degree in Circus Arts year 1	27
Foundation Degree in Circus Arts year 2	23
BA (Hons) Circus Arts (top-up)	14

The degree is delivered at the National Centre for Circus Arts in Hoxton, London, and is awarded by the University of Kent. Students must complete and pass all modules in each year of the course in order to obtain the qualifications.

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The 64 students currently enrolled on the programme include 16 overseas students who have joined us from America, Mexico, Singapore, Estonia, Switzerland, Spain and Saudi Arabia. Nine of our students are from London and the remaining students are from England, Wales and Scotland. A third of our home fee students are from a low-income background (students whose household income is below £25k)¹.

The National Centre for Circus Arts is a small specialist organisation. This is core to our practice and means that we are able to operate individualised approaches, for example to student support or welfare. This individualised approach is embedded from the point of audition, where we use a Contextual Admissions Framework² which includes reduced academic entry requirements, prioritising applicants from low socio-economic or disadvantaged backgrounds, or informing 'borderline' admissions decisions, to ensure we offer opportunities to students who may experience a variety of barriers such as financial, cultural or geographical disadvantage that may impact their routes into higher education. We know our students very well and our staff team has daily contact with all of them.

Our approach to learning and teaching is distinctive: it is flexible, to enable a tailored focus on specific practice disciplines which match individual students' aspirations to achieve high levels of technical as well as creative competency. This flexibility is innovative within circus education.

The Higher Education course at the National Centre for Circus Arts is unique in the UK. The focus not only on the skills specialism, but also on the business of being a performer, makes the course highly attractive for students as they envision a future as an artist. In the UK, all other current courses that offer circus arts do so as part of a wider performing arts offer, the closest being the BA in Contemporary Circus with Physical Theatre offered at Circomedia in Bristol. We see some students transfer at the end of the foundation degree from Bristol to the National Centre to spend a final year in a more highly specialised learning environment.

The Higher Education Department is structured in two parts: Academic Administration and Circus Delivery. Our Strand Managers set the individualised student timetables and ensure all students are assigned the most appropriate space and teacher for their particular class or chosen discipline. The Strand Managers themselves are teachers and deliver classes in the training spaces around 25% of their working week. This connection between the administration, design, scheduling and teaching means the quality of the programme and student experience is consistently high.

The National Centre for Circus Arts is a founder member of FEDEC, the European Federation of Professional Circus Schools. FEDEC is a European and international network of around 70 members (2/3 of secondary, vocational and higher education circus schools and training programmes, and 1/3 of organisations involved in information, research and circus arts advocacy) located in more than 20 countries in Europe and beyond.

As board members and lead partners, the National Centre has been involved in the development of supporting resources and pedagogy used across the world in the teaching of circus arts. National Centre teachers have been guest presenters at international conferences and authors of/contributors to FEDEC pedagogical manuals that are used by circus organisations around the world³.

Over many years the National Centre has been a keen partner in collaborations with other arts organisations and schools, aiming always to push the boundaries of what circus arts can contribute

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to shared creative endeavours and to give our students enhanced opportunities to build networks and work with a wide range of creative partners. We have welcomed students from other conservatoire schools to extend their training into technical circus rigging and stage management, facilitating placements with students from RADA, LAMDA and Bristol Old Vic Theatre school.

National Centre is based in Hoxton in central London (zone 1). Its facilities include specialist studio and performance spaces, library and IT and social spaces. See section SE6 below.

As a small specialist institution and with a denominator of just 80 students used in the data from the TEF dashboard, it is difficult to draw any conclusive evidence using this tool, whilst it indicates where we are above or below the threshold in specific areas it doesn't provide a great deal of contextual information. In 2022, the National Centre underwent a comprehensive Quality Standards Review (QSR) conducted by the QAA and a panel of 3 external HE specialists, which involved in-depth exploration of the course, interviews and meetings with both faculty and students, and we will be using the report from this review and references to external examiner feedback to evidence our excellence in teaching.

Students were offered the opportunity to create a TEF student submission and the process explained to Student Reps at the Student Staff Learning and Teaching committee. Although enthusiastic, the students felt that they would not have time to undertake this task alongside their studies. Instead, we have liaised with students at regular committee meetings and circulated drafts of this submission to Student Reps and the lead student contact for comments and input.

2. Student experience

SE1. Teaching, feedback and assessment



The University of Kent sets the framework for assessment and classification, including the use of external examiners. This is the primary reference point in our assessment processes.

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We publish and share with our students (via our webpages and via MS Teams) a Guide to Assessment⁴. This provides comprehensive details of our assessment methods and processes, and ensures that students are best able to prepare for assessment of their learning and skills.

We use a mixture of written work, continuous assessment of technical and creative practical work and assessment of circus performance (both solo and group) to assess our students. Modules include assessments in producing an ACE funding application and writing a business plan as well as writing Risk Assessments for performance which reflect professional practice and support the students' journey into the industry upon graduation.

We have clear learning outcomes⁵ and assessments become more challenging as students progress through the course, matching the increased achievement expected at each level of the FHEQ.

Written assessments are moderated by the Strand Managers and the Student Support Manager to ensure consistency of approach. Performance assessments are judged by panels of staff, with at least two people involved in assessing any performance and the process of creation.

Marks are confirmed by a Board of Examiners established under the University of Kent's framework. The Board includes staff involved in assessing the students in question, and has external membership⁶.

There is an external examiner, accountable to the University of Kent. The external examiner attends the majority of student public performances and moderates all student assessment and feedback throughout the year. They submit an annual report that is considered by student and staff members of Academic Board and a written response provided, which is sent to the external examiner and to the University of Kent⁷.

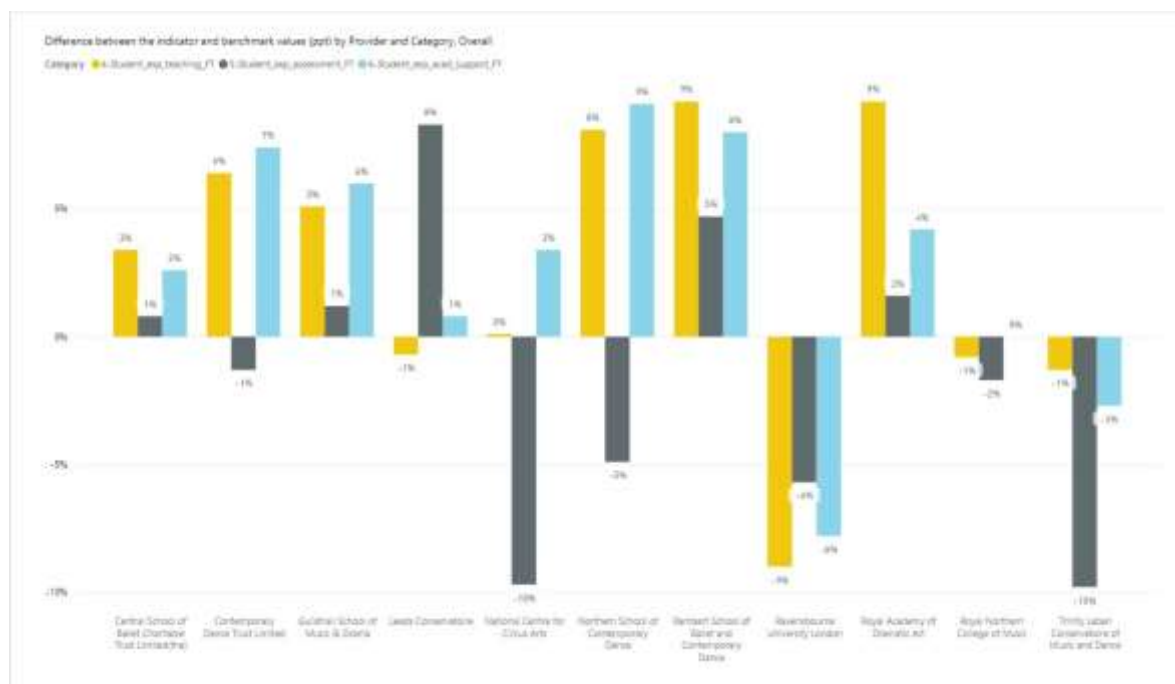
NCCA saw a significant rise in positive feedback around Assessment and Feedback scores from the National Student Survey (NSS) from around 34% in 2019 to 87% in 2020. This may have been due to the introduction of Mid Term Feedback points provided to students and the clarification of the feedback processes offered to teachers at the start of the year. Teachers are provided with grade descriptors⁸ and asked to refer to them when providing students with feedback on their progress in discipline classes throughout the year. This helps students have a greater understanding of what they need to work on to achieve good grades in these modules.

'My discipline class teachers make time for me in and out of class and I am expected to write and show a training journal every week for them to reflect on and give me feedback on as well as for me to reflect on the positives of my training for the week as well as the improvements that need to be made in the following week.'

Student response NSS2020_NCCA comments⁹

The TEF data dashboard indicates that, like some other small specialist institutions, our student ratings on assessment are lower than the benchmark (see below). The written feedback from students does not provide commentary to explain the low score, though we assume the impact of COVID has been significant to this particular outcome, as well as the low denominator value of this particular dataset. The data on our student outcomes and progression show we are consistently materially high above the benchmark which would indicate that students are achieving learning

outcomes to an excellent level. As a newly independently registered Higher Education Provider with the OfS we will be developing our Student Engagement Framework (The Student Voice) and will be exploring the student perceptions of assessment and feedback to ensure we are exceeding standards in the area.



Our recent Quality Standards Review¹⁰ report notes:

'The NCCA Guide to Assessment clearly explains to students the two forms of assessment used at NCCA, continuous assessment and designated assessment, and how these translate into specific assessment modes. Further explanation is provided in relation to grading, feedback and classification procedures. The roles of the student progress meeting committee, the exam board, and the external examiners is explained in a transparent manner. Students are told that the external examiner has access to all assessed work, and that the external examiner is mandated to ensure that all students are treated fairly and that standards are in line with other comparable degree courses. The section relating to assessment processes describes to students how assessment works in practice. The detail given within this section demonstrates a transparent approach towards communicating assessment processes to students and, in their meeting with the team, they confirmed that they have found assessment and classification processes to be reliable, fair and transparent. The meeting with academic staff revealed that teaching staff at NCCA understand the requirements for the use of external expertise, and the provider's assessment and classification processes.'

SE2. Course content and delivery

The Foundation Degree framework is built in order to sustain technical and creative progression, with an equal focus on artistic creativity and collaboration. The focus is on the continuous assessment of each student's individual progress, as well as performance-related assessment

both as an individual and as part of an ensemble. Students' analytical and critical skills are also assessed through research presentations, essays and other assignment projects.

Specialisation in a particular circus discipline happens over the course of the autumn term of the first year¹¹. It is a collaborative process between the student and staff, leading to a decision about which circus discipline is suited both physically and creatively to that individual student. The student then continues to develop their technical specialism throughout their time on the course alongside their broader studies.

Throughout the year they will undertake intensive physical classes in a range of circus-related activities, as well as sessions in performance, movement, and contextual studies which develops an understanding of circus in a wider performance context.

The first-year students have on average 25 hours of teacher contact per week. This high number of contact hours establishes the strong foundation of technical and soft skills required for the students' journey through the course. Contact hours reduce incrementally throughout the second and third years as students want and need more time for independent training. All students have nine hours per day of access to the studio spaces.

Students will typically have contact with between 10 and 15 teachers each week who deliver various elements of the course. The majority of our teaching staff are current or former industry professionals.

Students will experience a variety of class sizes. Some modules are delivered to the entire cohort of 15-25 students together with one teacher (movement and theatre for example), but the majority of classes are in small groups of 6-12 students or indeed 1-2-1 student and teacher classes for specific disciplines. Students will undertake a mixture of studio- and classroom-based learning.

The second year of the course is devoted to the development of a student's technical abilities in their circus discipline (specialisation) and other technical skills as well as increasing their understanding of creating, devising and performance contexts. Individual students each have a timetable that is specifically designed to support them in the development of their circus discipline, as well as scheduled independent learning sessions to allow students to work towards becoming an autonomous learner.

A typical week during year two will include classes in a student's specific discipline, other physical complementary classes, acrobatics, performance, movement and contextual studies, as well as time for research and independent practice.

In the BA (Hons) course the training remains intensive; weeks are 35 hours long with a mix of taught sessions and scheduled independent learning. Each year is 33 weeks in length in order to sustain physical progression. As well as physical skill development there is a strong focus on artistic exploration and creativity, contextual studies and business planning. There is continuous assessment of each student's individual progress, as well as performance-related assessment both as an individual and as part of an ensemble. Students' analytical and critical skills are also assessed through research projects and presentations.

Students participate in various performance tasks throughout their training. There is an ensemble production devised in collaboration with an external director or choreographer. This work takes

place over an intensive period of a number of weeks and culminates in the creation of a professional standard production for public viewing. These performances are often presented at an external venue such as Jacksons Lane, Southbank Centre and, on one occasion in 2016, in a graveyard in Tower Hamlets as part of the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). Occasionally student performances take place outside of London or the UK.

Students also create work on a Negotiated Performance Task¹². This gives students the opportunity to use all of the skills and techniques they have learned to create a devised performance. It allows them to show their personal approach to circus creation and to highlight the technical level that they have achieved. Work can be created as an individual performer or as part of a group with other students and is assessed on both the process of creation and the final performance. Again, these performances are open to the general public.

The Circus Producing and Production Management module¹³ in the second year of the foundation degree includes the creation of an Arts Council England funding application, setting students on a pathway into the professional world with a workable knowledge of what may be required to secure funding for their own projects.

Similarly, in the BA year students take a module called The Business Plan¹⁴ in which they develop and produce a model of circus-related business. Although an academic exercise, many graduates fulfil their business plans in their first year or two post-graduation and the skills they have developed through the process means they continue to plan and evaluate their work effectively as they work as independent artists. For example, two final-year students created and submitted a business plan for their street show '*Bananas*'¹⁵ using juggling, acrobatic and clowning techniques along with fruit to encourage playfulness and interactivity for all the family, and upon graduation the students toured their production across the UK and Netherlands. Each student is allocated a mentor to support them in their business planning. These mentors come from various organisations and previous mentors have included international bankers, lawyers and business entrepreneurs as well as arts professionals from other areas, who volunteer their time to participate in this project. This element of preparation for the professional world is unique to the course delivered at the National Centre.

The Higher Education curriculum has been created to ensure we produce the most rounded and versatile professional performers. Although students will base much of their learning around a specific discipline, they are exposed to many complementary learning environments. All students will gain experience in working creatively as a soloist as well as a member of an ensemble company. Both are important elements if a performer wants to be employable in the circus industry. Across the three-year programme students are trained in theatre and movement techniques. They are given fundamental techniques from multiple practitioners and are given the opportunity to use these tools within their chosen discipline. All students will develop basic skills across aerial, acrobatics and manipulation techniques alongside the in-depth training and exploration of their chosen specialism. We know these are valuable and transferable skills that give our students their favourable reputation in the industry.

The small specialist nature of our organisation means we can offer enrichment activities to enhance learning and development outcomes. Each year, we host a series of professional development workshops on offer to both students and our professional members. The workshops are bespoke and targeted at the needs of the participants and demands of the circus sector. These

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are curated and facilitated by our Strand Managers and Head of Circus Delivery who are currently, or have been, performers in the Circus Industry. This enables our students to have relevant and direct access to links into the profession.

Our recent Quality Standards Review report notes¹⁶:

'Staff at NCCA have a clear view of what 'high quality' means in the context of the provider's unique courses. The external examiner affirms the quality and standards of the courses at the NCCA and praises the NCCA courses for their rich uniqueness and how the structure and delivery of the Circus programme empowers students towards both professional and critical practices in Circus. The team considered that approved course documentation indicates that the teaching, learning and assessment design enable students to meet and demonstrate the intended learning outcomes. Observations of teaching and learning demonstrate sound practices and an approach to teaching that is appropriate to the nature of the courses at NCCA supported by strong links with circus professionals. The resources available to the students are high quality.'

SE3. Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement



The unique fact that NCCA runs a Higher Education programme and also has a professional membership means that students are training alongside industry professionals. Many students find opportunities for performing work through the connections they make with the professionals. The networking opportunities provided at NCCA are incredibly valuable and supportive for new artists that are establishing themselves.

The majority of teachers at NCCA are current or former performing artists¹⁷. The up-to-date industry knowledge and experience they bring is a defining characteristic of the school and a valuable asset of the programme. In addition to the technical and creative expertise of our teachers, students often see their teacher as a mentor and guide who can share insights and advice on how to navigate the profession.

Students also have opportunities to work with current professional practitioners via their annual productions, where creatives will be brought in to work with the students to create their solo and ensemble performance pieces. For example, recently the BA students worked with award-winning choreographer Jorge Crecis to create their final ensemble piece. Jorge's work has been performed in theatres around the world and he has a plethora of experience leading workshops internationally and coaching professional companies such as Akram Khan Company, DV8, Punchdrunk, Rambert, and more. This gave the final-year students an amazing opportunity to work on a creative process with a current professional practitioner. Outside of performance modules students are also provided with opportunities to host scratch nights at the Underbelly Festival and take part in Greenwich and Docklands Festival and Circa in Auch. This provides students with real life industry experience that is invaluable to their development as artists.

Visiting industry professionals teach on the Circus Producing and Production Management module on topics such as marketing, tax, funding applications and price setting, all of which are fundamental for professional performers, particularly as so many graduates will be freelancers.

Beyond the pure circus skills, the students we work with today are influenced by (and in turn influence) theatre, dance, film and visual art. We provide them with access to a wide range of visiting professionals, not only via timetabled classes and workshops: every day we schedule periods of time when students on the Higher Education programme have access to training alongside our professional community of artists. This provides skills sharing and networking opportunities as well as creating vital relationships in readiness for graduating into the professional world.

The student performances are advertised widely and we invite industry professionals and current practitioners to these shows to provide exposure of students and facilitate potential employment opportunities upon the student's graduation from the programme. As part of the assessment for the performance modules, an element that is assessed is the 'moment of performance' and the assessor for this is usually selected from a current dance, theatre or circus company. This provides students with an opportunity to receive specific and invaluable feedback from an industry professional.

SE4. Staff professional development

NCCA has a dedicated Teacher Education Manager who has the responsibility for supporting and developing our teaching practice.

At the beginning of each academic year, the Teacher Education Manager leads a 'Teachers' Week' to all salaried and hourly teaching staff, ensuring teachers are ready for the year ahead. During this time, they deliver training and development sessions in line with the requirements of each programme area, such as, '*Working with neurodiverse participants*', '*Supporting students through studies*' and '*Managing student injuries*'.

Many of our teachers work across multiple programme areas at NCCA, for example across both the Higher Education programme and also our recreational and progressive training for young people. This means we have a consistency of teaching standards in all areas of the organisation. Our youth development participants are taught by some of the same teachers that work on the

Higher Education programme which helps to ensure our feeder programmes supply the Higher Education programme with suitably trained and prepared applicants. These teachers are aspirational for the young participants and often help young people to choose circus arts as a viable career path. We provide opportunities for current students and recent graduates to be a part of our Assistant Teacher Training programme which gives students the opportunity to develop teaching practices as well as providing professional development skills for our staff.

The Strand Managers, Head of Circus Delivery and Head of Academic Administration & Student Support all hold PGCHE qualifications that they were supported to undertake whilst working for the National Centre, providing them with excellent skills in teaching practice, education research and theory. Our contextual studies Strand Manager holds a masters in Gender, Sexuality and Culture, and her article on '*Gender Representation in Circus*' has been published in Taylor and Francis¹⁸. Our Head of Higher Education Delivery sits on the board of trustees at Jacksons Lane Theatre and is also a member of the Healthy Conservatoires Network.

Through the Teacher Education Manager role, we have developed specific teacher training programmes which are delivered to our teaching staff as well as to other circus and non-circus organisations around the country. An important collaboration was with Chelsea Football Academy where their coaches learned creative approaches to movement and skill acquisition, for example.

The Teacher Education Manager ensures they are developing their own knowledge and skills around best practice of teaching and creating relationships with external organisations, and engaging in knowledge exchange to the benefit of both parties. For example, the Teacher Education Manager recently worked on a research project with the UCL MSc in Performing Arts Medicine course and fed their learning from this back into NCCA.

SE5. The supportive learning environment, academic support

On such a physically demanding course, the continued physical wellbeing of our students is of course of paramount importance. A few years ago we introduced a strength and conditioning coach as a permanent member of staff. This shift from providing on-site physiotherapy and therefore 'fixing' problems and injuries when they happen, to creating a culture where prevention of injury comes from being strong, fit, flexible and in tune with their own bodies' needs, was a huge change for staff and students alike. This was a huge step forward in how the National Centre ensures students are maintaining their own health and physical wellbeing.

We have two off-site physiotherapists that we use regularly. These two therapists have been working with circus artists for many years and now consider themselves circus specialists. Their professional development has been beneficial for NCCA, the students and the physios themselves. We have established an important communication system with the therapists which ensures the students can get continuity between the sessions with the physio, and the rehabilitation programme designed by our strength and conditioning coach back at NCCA.

50% of students on our course present with mental health conditions ranging from anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm and suicidal ideation, panic disorders and OCD. On average 30% of students have been diagnosed with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpDLs) such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, ADHD, ADD, Asperger's and Autism. NCCA student support provision was

increased in the 19-20 academic year with the addition of a much-needed Student Support Manager who joined in January 2020. This has been a great benefit to the students and staff. The full-time role has increased the amount of direct support students are able to access on a daily basis. The post holder has many years' experience working with students in arts education, is a SpLD specialist and holds a PGDip in Supporting Dyslexic Adults in HE. Students are all screen tested for any SpLDs at the start of the course in September and are fully supported in the process of applying for the Disabled Students Allowance. Part of the Student Support Manager's role is to develop Academic Study Skills lessons to deliver to students across all years and also to provide English Language Support to students from the EU or overseas.

At the arrival of the Student Support Manager plans were put in place to develop robust Student Support Strategies, however these were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. During this time the student support provision moved entirely online and the need for support became greater as students' anxiety and stress levels increased in line with the rest of the worlds. We were able to deliver high-level mental health and academic support providing students with constant access to the two members of student support staff during this time via MS Teams and scheduling weekly general check-ins with Strand Managers.

Over the last year the Student Support Manager has established a partnership with '*Problem Shared*'¹⁹, an online service which provides support to our counselling provision via a community of exceptional quality practitioners who are available to provide individual student counselling through a secure and stable video conferencing platform.

At enrolment and throughout the program, students are provided with an in-depth guide to Student Support that informs them of the resources that are available to them²⁰.

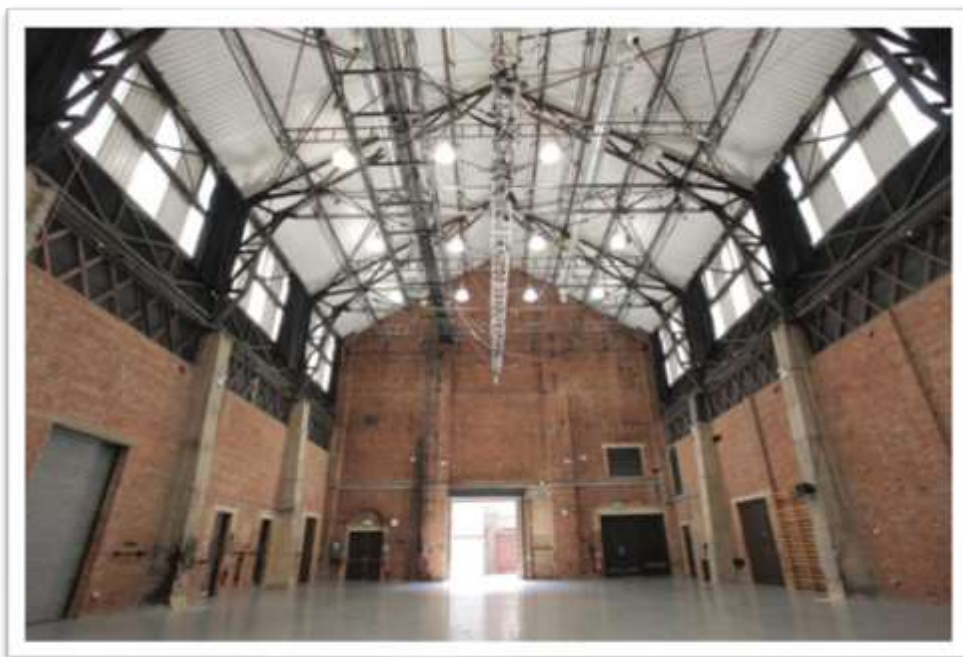
SE6. Physical and virtual learning resources

Based in a Victorian power station in the heart of London (zone 1), NCCA provides unique and impressive facilities ideal for the very specific needs of circus training²¹. Over the past two decades there has been a significant capital investment into our Hoxton site. There are two large training spaces and multiple smaller studios providing a wide range of educational and training environments for students and professional artists.

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The NCCA's teaching rooms comprise:

The Combustion Chamber: our largest space (425 m²), ideal for productions and discipline training, movement and theatre classes.



The Generating Chamber: a large space (280m²) retaining the period industrial features of the building's former life as a power station, ideal for discipline, movement and theatre classes.



Creation Studio: a mid-sized studio (110m²) ideal for rehearsal and development.



Upper Link Studio: a spacious, modern studio (105m²) suitable for break out space, movement and conditioning classes.

Top Studio: ideal for manipulation disciplines, movement and conditioning classes.



Middle Studio: flooded with natural light, ideal for movement, theatre and discipline classes.

The Gym: equipped with weights and callisthenic equipment.

The Library: used for classroom-based teaching, has 200 volumes and 12 computer spaces for students to use. Students have access to their Office 365 accounts and the use of MS Teams, our VLE. The Library is equipped with state-of-the-art presentation technologies and can be configured to be a large lecture room or two rooms that enable a quiet break out space for meetings or small group sessions.

Our recent Quality Standards Review report notes²²:

'As a national centre the specialist nature of the facilities is truly worthy of the title; they are highly tailored to student learning needs, but also provide exemplary facilities of the professional world. One of the key benefits of the physical space is that it is multifaceted and provides exceptional resources for the circus community, be that on a profession or educational basis. The way that both can, and do, integrate within the space is excellent. Beyond the specialist nature of the Centre, the offices, learning resources centre and other communal spaces enable staff and student to work in an environment that fully supports the student learning experience'.

We have a strong educational approach to health and safety. With a full-time technical rigging department, we teach students the basics of rigging procedures such as equipment inspection, equipment set up, knot-tying and safe practice when working at height, and we encourage students to be creative with equipment use and rigging design. The technical support allows students to be innovative and we have seen the rise of new and exciting pieces of equipment and performance structures being developed and integrated into productions.

SE7. Student engagement



We proactively engage students in the quality of their educational experience via a number of mechanisms:

a. Student module evaluations

We use midterm module evaluations surveys²³ to gauge the student experience of the course as it is running and make any reasonable adjustments to support the students' learning experience, and end of term module evaluations to reflect on the module and make any improvements for the following year.

b. Student focus groups

As well as anonymous individual feedback surveys²⁴ we also hold group feedback meetings at the end of each term which can be useful to understand the collective student experience. At the beginning of each term we hold a meeting with each year group to disseminate information about any changes or improvements that have been made and close the feedback loop.

c. Student rep system and Committee membership

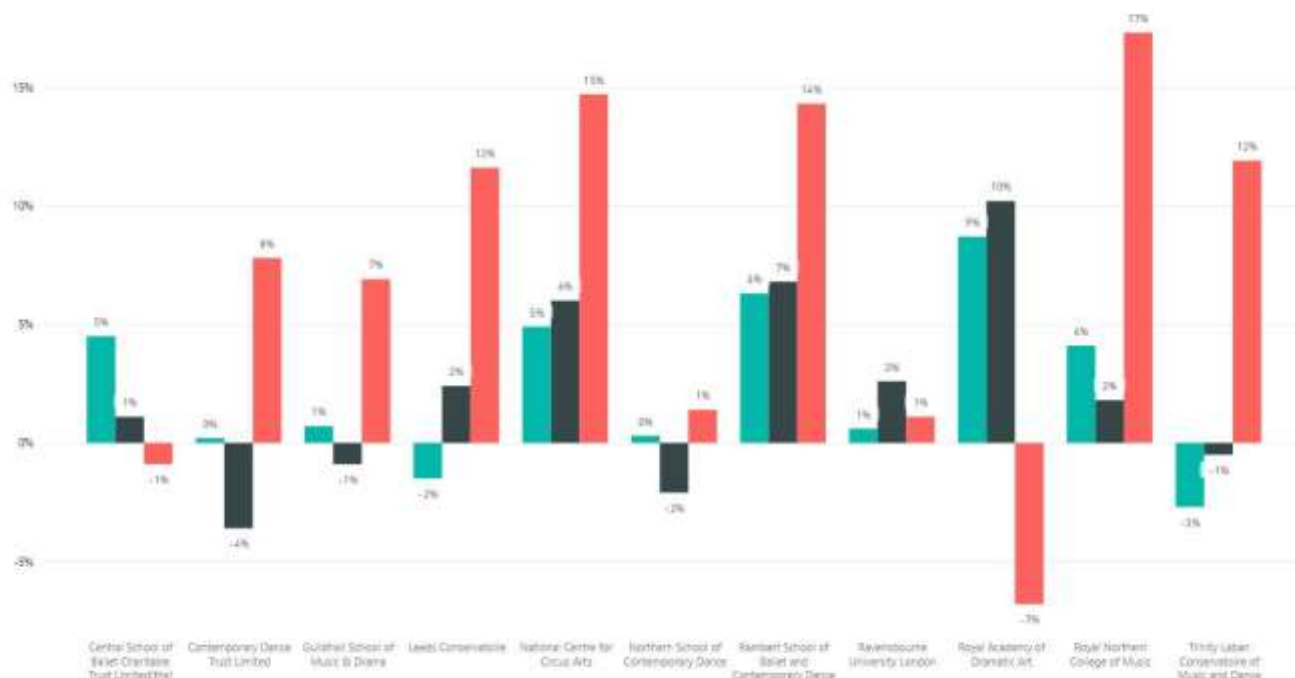
Collective student feedback is also obtained throughout the academic year by our student representatives. Up to 3-4 students from each year group are elected to serve as reps and are added to a specific MS Teams group where we share any student-related updates that require student consultation such as changes to policies and various engagement strategies. Student Reps serve on Student Staff Learning and Teaching Committee (SSLTC) and have a role in feeding in student concerns²⁵. SSLTC meetings are co-chaired by a student and by a member of staff. Students are also tasked with adding to the agenda and minuting SSLTC meetings and are encouraged to feedback to their peers regularly. SSLTC and MS Teams in particular provide good means for quick and easy interaction with students. Reps also serve on Academic Board²⁶, which ensures that the student voice is heard when the most significant academic issues are being discussed. As evidenced in the TEF indicator and benchmark values by Provider and Category, overall the Student Voice scores higher than the national benchmark. As part of our newly registered independence we are enhancing our Student Voice/Engagement framework to ensure we are providing students with a robust mechanism to enact positive change to their learning experience.

Our recent Quality Standards Review²⁷ report notes:

'NCCA has many ways in which students are engaged in feeding back either collectively, as students representatives sitting on committees such as the SSLTC or on the Academic Board, for example, or individually through survey feedback and via the continuous 'open door' approach for students to feedback or discuss with staff. Although currently there is no one overarching report on student feedback, NCCA's approach to reviewing all feedback through the annual monitoring reports led the team to consider this as a credible way of evaluating student feedback. Students reported that they are fully engaged in the quality of their educational experience and could provide examples of change brought about to improve their learning experience.'

3. Student Outcomes

Difference between the indicator and benchmark values (ppt) by Provider and Category, Overall
Category: 1-Continuation_FT, 2-Completion_FT, 3-Progression_FT



As evidenced in the graph above, National Centre is materially above the national benchmark in Continuation, Completion and Progression.

Continuation, Completion

Students are able to continue their educational journey thanks to the rigorous support – including physical, mental, and financial – offered by the National Centre. We were able to maintain 100% student retention during the pandemic which is a testament to the work of the Strand Managers and HE team's quick responses and course adaptations that allowed the programme to be delivered online. National Centre has had impressive retention rates over the last 3 years and has a robust intermission process in place²⁸. The main cause for intermission during the last 3 years has been due to injury or personal reasons not related to the programme²⁹. The majority of students have been able to return to their studies the following academic year if not sooner and are fully supported in these transitions by the Student Support Manager. The aggregate indicators for the most recent 5 years show a continuation rate of 92.5% for Foundation Degree students; and 97.4% for BA students. Where students do not progress, this is largely due to sustained injury, or because they leave to take up professional roles.

Students are offered financial support to help them continue and complete their studies. NCCA offers scholarships in the form of cash bursaries to eligible home-fee students depending on their financial circumstances. All students have access to NCCA Hardship funding and with support from the Leverhulme Trust we are able to provide students with financial aid during production periods and beyond³⁰.

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We are also able to offer funds of between £2,500 and £5000 to home-fee students as part of the Leverhulme Arts Award Scholarship³¹. These funds are awarded to students who are showing great dedication and potential during their first year of the programme.

As shown in the graph above NCCA is materially above the national benchmark for completion. Of the 39 students who graduated with a BA (Hons) in Circus Arts since 2020, 49% achieved an Upper Second Class qualification and 25% were awarded First Class Degrees. The pass rate for the 76 students on the Foundation degree since 2020 is 75%³². These pass rates can be attributed to the consistent and constant support provided to the students from staff at all levels of the HE Programme.

Progression

In the final weeks of the academic year, we hold a careers week which includes workshops, seminars and discussions run by circus professionals and other practitioners from various disciplines. Recent sessions included a wall running workshop with Lindsey Butcher, a parkour workshop with Philip Hulford, an Odissi dance workshop with Pracheeti Dance, and workshops lead by Fiona Thornhill, Enni Lymi and Charlie Wheeler. There was also an introduction to the MA in Circus Directing at Circomedia, and the Dance with Circus MA at DEDA in Derby. All of these workshops and talks were part of our student enrichment and career preparedness work.

Graduates go on to perform with the most highly regarded circus companies in the world. Over the last ten years, 135 of our graduates, representing 60% of the total number of graduates in that period, have gone on to work in, or set-up, circus companies that tour internationally, or to work in overseas-based international companies.

The National Centre maintains relationships with casting directors at Cirque Du Soleil, Circa and The 7 Fingers amongst others. Auditions for various international shows are held at the National Centre in London. Many circus companies are smaller and the direct links within the industry mean the National Centre and our graduates are in dialogue with them frequently meaning the industry can be fed with suitable skills and talent. This makes National Centre graduates highly employable.

As well as performing with existing companies, many NCCA graduates form their own circus companies on graduation, and thereby become future employers. Examples include Barely Methodical Troupe, Simple Cypher and Revel Puck Circus. The Director of Revel Puck Circus is a NCCA graduate and they currently employ eight artists, all from NCCA.

The primary focus for students is for them to enter the profession as performers. However, we are now seeing that the training they receive at NCCA also provides graduates with the framework to develop their skills as teachers, choreographers, directors and circus entrepreneurs.

Our recent Quality Standards Review³³ report notes:

'The evidence strongly indicates that students are supported by both academic staff and non-academic staff working together closely to enable student achievement. Students tend to agree that they are supported to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes... Given all the evidence seen by the team, in particular the thorough, individual and continuous support given to all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes, the team has a high degree of confidence in this judgement.'

4. References

- ¹ 'Student Database 2022', September 2022, unpublished, held in the Higher Education document management system
- ² 'Contextual Admissions Framework' submitted to NCCA Academic Board, March 2022 available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2022/09/ncca-framework-for-contextual-admissions.pdf>
- ³ 'FEDEC Who We Are' available at <http://www.fedec.eu/en/34-history>
- ⁴ 'Guide to Assessment' reviewed and updated Aug 2021 available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/08/guide-to-assessment.pdf>
- ⁵ 'Foundation Degree Course Specifications' submitted to University of Kent Quality Office, March 2020 available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/07/fda-coursespec-updated2021.pdf> and 'BA (Hons) Degree Course Specifications' submitted to University of Kent Quality Office, May 2016 available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/07/progspecbatopup-1494588596.pdf>
- ⁶ 'Annex J: Meetings of Boards of Examiners' December 2020 available at <https://www.kent.ac.uk/education/regulatory-framework/codes-of-practice-for-taught-courses#annex-j>
- ⁷ 'External Examiners Report' August 2022, unpublished, held in the Higher Education document management system
- ⁸ 'Guide to Assessment' pages 12-14, reviewed and updated Aug 2021 available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/08/guide-to-assessment.pdf>
- ⁹ 'Student response NSS2020_NCCA comments', unpublished, held in the Higher Education document management system
- ¹⁰ 'DQB Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students report' page 36 available at <https://dqbengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/national-centre-for-circus-arts-qsr-22.pdf>
- ¹¹ 'The Student Handbook 21-22' page 19, September 2021, available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/10/student-handbook-21-22-octupdate.pdf>
- ¹² 'The Student Handbook 21-22' pages 23 and 24, September 2021, available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/10/student-handbook-21-22-octupdate.pdf>
- ¹³ 'The Student Handbook 21-22' page 21, September 2021, available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/10/student-handbook-21-22-octupdate.pdf>
- ¹⁴ 'The Student Handbook 21-22' September 2021, page 26, available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/10/student-handbook-21-22-octupdate.pdf>
- ¹⁵ <https://danielsimu.com/banana-circus/>

- ¹⁶ 'DQB Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students report' page 53, available at <https://dqbenland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/national-centre-for-circus-arts-qsr-22.pdf>
- ¹⁷ Key teacher CVs, unpublished, held in the Higher Education document management system
- ¹⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19443927.2018.1504114>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.problemshared.net/who-we-are>
- ²⁰ 'Guide to Student Support' reviewed August 21, available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/08/guide-to-student-support.pdf>
- ²¹ <https://www.shoreditchelectric.com/>
- ²² 'DQB Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students report' page 65, available at <https://dqbenland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/national-centre-for-circus-arts-qsr-22.pdf>
- ²³ 'Student Feedback' annual, unpublished, held in the Higher Education document management system
- ²⁴ 'Autumn Term Feedback' created Oct 2022, [Microsoft Forms](#)
- ²⁵ 'SSLTC Terms of Reference 2122' July 21, unpublished, held in the Higher Education document management system
- ²⁶ 'AB Work Plan 2223' July 2022, unpublished, held in the Higher Education document management system
- ²⁷ 'DQB Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students report' page 72, available at <https://dqbenland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/national-centre-for-circus-arts-qsr-22.pdf>
- ²⁸ 'Intermission Policy' reviewed August 21, available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/08/intermission-policy.pdf>
- ²⁹ 'Student Database 2022-23' Annual, unpublished, held in the Higher Education document management system
- ³⁰ 'Fees & Funding' reviewed annually, available at <https://www.nationalcircus.org.uk/student-support-and-faqs/fees-and-funding/>
- ³¹ 'Arts Scholarship' available at <https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/arts-scholarships>
- ³² 'University of Kent Pass List', annual, held on the Higher Education document management system
- ³³ 'DQB Quality and Standards Review for Providers Applying to Register with the Office for Students report' page 87-88, available at <https://dqbenland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/national-centre-for-circus-arts-qsr-22.pdf>