
Summary of the submission to HEFCE's review of exceptional funding for institutions

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Introduction

1. This is a shortened version of the the submission made by the Conservatoire to HEFCE in September 2008. This was a response to a request from HEFCE for an explanation as to why the Conservatoire believes it continues to qualify for exceptional funding.

Background

2. Established in 2001, the Conservatoire specialises in training artists who will join the world's best on entry to their professions and go on to shape the future of the art forms of dance, drama and circus. Students train at Conservatoire schools based in London, Leeds and Bristol, giving the institution a unique national role.
3. The Conservatoire is an higher education institution with a unique structure which comprises a partnership between eight affiliate schools. These affiliates have international reputations as vocational training institutions delivering the highest quality results in their respective fields. They are:

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School
Central School of Ballet
Circus Space
London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art
London Contemporary Dance School
Northern School of Contemporary Dance
Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance
Royal Academy of Dramatic Art

4. The Conservatoire offers some 30 programmes in dance, drama and circus arts. All courses are vocational, and the Conservatoire has pioneered high-level foundation degrees, which equip students to enter the profession. As well as courses aimed at preparing dancers, actors, circus artists, and stage managers, Conservatoire schools offer specialist programmes and MA routes for designers, theatre directors and in choreography and dance education. There are approximately 1,120 students across the Conservatoire, with 17% of the student population drawn from EU countries other than the UK and a further 10% from overseas.
5. Conservatoire training aims to prepare students for direct entry as artists into the professions of dance, drama and circus. This requires specific forms of tuition, personalised learning and special interaction between teachers and artists, industry-standard premises, professional performance experience and support throughout the training. These as a whole account for the total "high" cost.

Additional Public Value

6. The Conservatoire uses its exceptional funding to deliver additional public value in six ways:
 - a) Producing exceptional artists who shape the future of dance, drama and circus arts;
 - b) Fostering talent and creativity through world-class vocational training;
 - c) Finding and nurturing the finest UK talent;
 - d) Supporting the cultural infrastructure;
 - e) Fuelling development in the creative industries;
 - f) International leadership in dance, drama and circus arts.

a) Producing exceptional artists who shape the future of dance, drama and circus arts

7. The future artistic and cultural life of the nation is sustained, developed and shaped by Conservatoire-trained entrants to the professions of dance, drama and circus who meet the needs of employers and who have been trained to match the world's best. The primary public value delivered by the Conservatoire is its graduates and in the creation of its world-class alumni. This is done through high-cost, specialist education and training using staff drawn from the highest levels of the profession, many of whom are practising artists.
8. The perceived quality of these graduates amongst employers is clear from the fact that many Conservatoire students have contracts before graduation and this is evidenced in the Conservatoire's exceptional employment record. Leading agents, casting directors and choreographers source talent from the showcases of the Conservatoire schools. Some three years after graduating, around 90% of Conservatoire alumni remain as practitioners in the field for which they were trained. Conservatoire graduates are held in high regard because of their levels of professionalism and understanding of the work environment which comes from being taught in a truly vocational manner. Graduates are equipped with the technical skills, knowledge of safe practice, artistic understanding and a habit of critical reflection which are needed to achieve sustained careers. They are also able to address the diverse demands of traditional repertoire, seminal pieces and constantly evolving art forms.
9. Conservatoire graduates are found in leading companies in the UK and internationally. Many rise to leadership positions. If one takes the last two years' graduates as an example (2006-07 and 2007-08), typical graduate destinations include entry for actors to the national theatres, the Royal National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, and work in major independent companies, such as Cheek by Jowl, the Globe Theatre and Shared Experience and theatre festivals such as Chichester as well as extensively in BBC and independent radio, television and film. Similarly, the dancers join equivalent national organisations, such as English National Ballet, Scottish Ballet and Northern Ballet Theatre, and the major contemporary companies, including Rambert Dance Company, Richard Alston Dance Company, Hofesh Shechter, Henry Ogúike, Michael Clark, Jasmin Vardimon Dance Company and New Adventures. Circus artists have joined circus establishments such as the Generating Company. As well as joining institutions and organisations, many Conservatoire-trained artists create their own companies (and thus employ other artists), a notable example being choreographer Akram Khan.

Stage management and technical theatre graduates are working in every leading producing theatre in the country, including the Royal Opera House, Birmingham Rep and Manchester Royal Exchange. Other regular destinations include BBC television and Aardman. Graduates from Conservatoire schools continue to play major film roles, working with leading directors (for example, 2008 Oscar-winner Daniel Day Lewis in *There will be Blood*, Dominic Cooper starring in 2008 summer films *The Duchess* and *Mamma Mia!* and Gemma Arterton, appearing in the forthcoming James Bond film *Quantum of Solace*, as well as taking the leading role in the BBC's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*)

b) Fostering talent and creativity through world-class vocational training

10. At the Conservatoire, the most talented students are able to receive the specialist training they need to succeed at the highest levels of dance, drama and circus. These students are identified and selected on the basis of talent and the potential to benefit from the intensive training, irrespective of background.
11. Extensive audition processes, held throughout the country and abroad, select some 400 students from 10,000 applicants. The cornerstone of the Conservatoire's approach is to offer all applicants an audition (or interview for non-performance courses) in order to find the best talent. The sharp increase in numbers auditioning experienced by Conservatoire schools on entering the public sector demonstrates that students who would once have been deterred from applying for economic reasons will now do so
12. At the highest level, there is both a limit to the talent pool and a limited demand from the sector. The Conservatoire understands the need for a balance between the two and has long experience of carefully balancing talent and need within a controlled-numbers framework. Whilst the focus is on nurturing the individual artist, students profit from the stimulus of being brought together with their peers at the highest level.
13. Conservatoire training is informed by a deep understanding of the art forms and of the needs of the professions. It is achieved by immersing students in the practice of their art forms. This includes the physical embodiment of technical skills, engagement with creative processes and the experience of preparing for, and performing in, professional conditions. Essential specialist support includes medical back-up, body conditioning, full professional familiarisation and on-call personal tutoring.
14. The Conservatoire attaches the highest importance to its understanding of the professional context of performing. This includes addressing the needs of employers and identifying artistic and technical developments, so that students may be suitably prepared to succeed in the real world of work and continue to develop their chosen art forms during and after their performing and technical careers. This is achieved by employing teaching staff who continue their own creative careers and by engaging distinguished visiting professionals to work with students, directing, making pieces and designing productions.
15. The thoroughness of these processes is evidenced by the Conservatoire's excellent retention rate, which the National Audit Office, in its 2007 report, identified as one of the best in the HE sector.

c) Finding and nurturing the finest UK talent

16. The Conservatoire provides a point of aspiration for dance, drama and circus students throughout Britain. Its nationwide operation and national remit enable it to seek the most talented students from across the country. This is achieved by a combination of active and longstanding relationships with feeder organisations, schools and youth companies, and by widening-participation activities, including selective, pre-vocational programmes.
17. Students entering the Conservatoire generally require extensive pre-entry training. This is not offered by the school system in the UK. The Conservatoire articulated the national need for improvements in prior training and constantly uses its influence to improve the pathways into vocational training in dance, drama and circus available nationally. Conservatoire schools host two centres for advanced training in dance based at Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) in Leeds and London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS) in London. A similar model operates at Central School of Ballet (CSB) in London. This model has also been used by Circus Space (CS) to develop its own Youth Circus, aimed at increasing participation in circus arts and generating a culture of youth circus in the UK.
18. In addition to selective, pre-vocational programmes, Conservatoire schools offer a number of widening-participation activities. These include short courses, summer schools, student performance tours to schools, classes for children and young people, workshops, youth performance groups and companies. The Youth Circus initiative is coupled with outreach work in Circus Space's home and neighbouring boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Tower Hamlets and Newham in London.
19. As an aspect of its public purpose, the Conservatoire is open to, and pursues, talent wherever it can be found. The extensive auditioning process enables the Conservatoire to identify talented students who might not otherwise consider higher education (including students who come through the classical-ballet-training route) and the auditioning procedures pick up non-traditional forms of talent. The Conservatoire is better able than previously to select and train students with physical impairments. Now, the talent and potential of these students is recognised and the approach to training can support their individual needs. This is coupled with the Conservatoire developing specific expertise in working with dyslexic and dyspraxic students in a performance context.
20. The Conservatoire's processes in these areas are highly regarded and they make an important contribution to the public purpose of encouraging participation in these art forms. The Conservatoire schools outreach and widening-participation programmes generate value, not only for the Conservatoire itself but for vocational training institutions generally. In part, they address talent gaps identified through the auditioning process, including reviewing equalities data. The Conservatoire is currently collaborating with the leading Asian theatre company, Tamasha, to find ways to improve the participation of Asian students in technical-theatre training.

d) Supporting the cultural infrastructure

21. The Conservatoire operates as a laboratory of artistic and creative processes and of training practice, which involves interaction with the professions at every stage. In this, it makes a significant contribution to sustaining the creative infrastructure and cultural distinction of the UK. The high standing of its staff and their connectedness to the professional world are drivers of this work. The Conservatoire's expertise is shared widely in a range of activities which support the dance, drama and circus professions and serves as a resource for the ongoing support of graduates and the broader artistic community. The Conservatoire's public purpose is also served by the various archives and libraries within Conservatoire schools, which contain video and costume holdings as well as books and manuscripts, including the UK's national circus collection.
22. The art forms of dance, drama and circus are shaped by the Conservatoire's productions of new and unfamiliar work from writers, directors and choreographers. The Conservatoire is a significant provider of public performances in its own theatres and through the work of its touring companies. This gives important exposure to rare areas of the repertoire and international material, which would prove difficult to produce commercially in the UK. Such performances typically play to over 200,000 people a year in all parts of the UK and abroad.
23. All the new works commissioned by the Conservatoire serve a pedagogic purpose in the preparation of young artists, as well as creating synergies of opportunity and talent. This creative work also impacts on the development of the art forms. The playwright Mark Ravenhill's workshops of new material with London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) actors lead on to productions in the Royal National Theatre (eg Mother Clapp's Molly House). The Conservatoire awards commissions to new artists, as well as established names, to make work. The choreographer Hofesh Shechter's advancement has been much encouraged in this way. The Conservatoire is pioneering the creation of a new genre of chamber musicals with Conor Mitchell and Matt Peover. Its engagement with circus arts is building national capability in a new area, including developing the essential prior-training structures and progression routes towards advanced training and encouraging public understanding of this field. This is evidenced through the London and Bristol staging of Sequins and Sawdust, a collaboration between Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (BOVTS), Circus Space and Cirque Bijou.
24. In preparing its own students, the Conservatoire aims to deliver a curriculum which will sustain long-term and complex careers. It is aware that the performance lives of some students might be relatively short for reasons beyond their control. This is why as well as high-level training, the programmes incorporate skills which will serve students in their performance lives and beyond; for example, the delivery of educational workshops, self-management and presentation and business planning. In this area, three Conservatoire schools participate in an awards scheme in business planning for artists run by Deutsche Bank.
25. In all this activity, the Conservatoire pushes the boundaries of the art forms. Testing and developing new techniques and approaches extends to other areas, including, for example, the design of studios, in which the Conservatoire's advanced specifications provide a model for other organisations to follow. In circus, students explore and develop new types of equipment and apparatus.

e) Fuelling development in the creative industries

26. The Conservatoire fuels developments in the creative industries by preparing the next generation of artists, supporting the talent infrastructure and incubating small creative businesses. According to Creative and Cultural Skills (the sector skills council), the creative and cultural industries are the UK's fastest growing sector. The total creative footprint covers 7.3% of the economy and is growing at 5% per year. Within this, some 85,000 people work in creative industries with performing artists. Some 55% of people working in performance are self-employed. There are around 31,000 businesses, with a gross added value per person of some £28,200.
27. The Conservatoire acts as a producer in its own right; commissioning, restaging and touring work and fulfils an essential role in supporting artists early in their careers. Many Conservatoire trained artists form their own companies and become employers in their own right. The graduate companies at NSCD, CSB and LCDS provide models of practice for students as well as disseminating work and exposure for these artists ahead of launching their professional careers. In its extensive performance programmes, the Conservatoire provides experience and exposure to emerging creative talent among writers, directors, choreographers, composers and designers. The Conservatoire is well-placed to provide this support across different art forms because of its unique combination of dance, drama and circus arts schools.
28. The concentration of staff needed to realise the individual potential for the most gifted students has established a critical mass of expertise in the Conservatoire. There are some 500 individuals involved in learning and teaching in Conservatoire schools, many of whom combine teaching with professional engagements within the creative industries. An example is the Conservatoire's National Teaching Fellow, David Carey, who teaches at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) and works as a voice coach with professional companies, develops the skills of other teachers and engages in related research within an international setting.
29. Circus Space fosters small businesses by letting space to small creative companies. Some of these are directly involved in the circus supply chain, including its Business and Enterprise Learning Unit. Circus Space also works with European Regional Development funding to support emerging circus companies. RADA and LAMDA use their knowledge base to offer business training, and LAMDA is one of the leading providers to the creative industries of grade examinations in speech and drama. LCDS is part of The Place, home to Richard Alston Dance Company, the Robin Howard Dance Theatre and a host of support services for artists. Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (BOVTS) is part of the Bristol arts infrastructure including regional partnerships with the University of the West of England UWE, Aardman, Bristol's Asian Arts Agency and The Tobacco Factory.
30. These spin off activities are a critical part of the Conservatoire environment, which fosters close relationships between industry and education providers. The Conservatoire adds value by maximising the use of its outstanding facilities, resources and staff base.

f) International leadership in dance, drama and circus arts

31. Through its international work, the Conservatoire brings the UK to the world and the world to the UK. This dimension serves to increase the UK's international standing in the arts, adds to the competitiveness of UK higher education, expands international opportunities for UK graduates and strengthens the levels of cultural sharing, transfer and influence across the world.
32. The Conservatoire schools compete in an international market for students and staff and draw on artists from all over the world to work, create and perform in their institutions. Some 27% of the student body are drawn from overseas, of whom 17% come from the EU and 10% from elsewhere. Conservatoire staff engage in international skill sharing as a means of exporting knowledge across the world.
33. The Conservatoire's strong provision of advice to international partners makes a good contribution to the standing of the UK. Over the past two years, the Conservatoire has been providing training for the most senior staff of the Beijing Dance Academy (the leading institution in China), advice on Conservatoire training in the Basque country, and guidance to Codarts (the Rotterdam Conservatoire) on the creation of a circus school. Circus Space currently holds the chair of FEDEC, the European Federation of Professional Circus Training Schools, and regularly provides advice to governments across Europe at both local and national level on the development of circus.
34. Closer to home, the Conservatoire's guidance is sought on matters from developing a new curriculum for FE drama and conservatoire training for animators to the provision of theatre technicians for the 2012 London Olympics.

Conclusion

35. The Conservatoire was born from a need to protect high level vocational training in dance and drama and to sustain the UK's leadership in these fields internationally. The addition of circus arts to the Conservatoire's portfolio enhances the UK's reputation in this field.
36. The primary public value delivered by the Conservatoire is that it produces world-class alumni who go on to shape the future of the performing arts and are essential to sustaining the cultural life of the nation. This has cultural, economic and reputational value, which extends beyond the Conservatoire. The specialist training needed to succeed at the highest levels is made available to the finest talents irrespective of background, and the Conservatoire is unstinting in the search for talent wherever it can be found, including non traditional forms and sources. This process stimulates wider participation in the arts and provides a national point of aspiration for dance, drama and circus students throughout Britain.
37. The additional public value cannot be secured without training of this kind, with its defining focus on nurturing young artists as individuals. The Conservatoire realises this with the benefit of privately raised funds and of partnership working. The identified additional costs make the essential contribution to realising the public purpose.
38. The Conservatoire is rigorous in its delivery of training, compassionate in its support for its students and imaginative in its promotion of dance, drama and circus arts. It provides valued support to the cultural infrastructure and fuels the development of the creative industries, pushing the boundaries of the art forms, developing national capability in new areas, building enterprise and enriching national life with its public performance programming. Its international work increases the UK's world standing in the arts and adds to the competitiveness of UK higher education. Its graduates are cultural ambassadors who extend and enhance the creative life of the UK.

The Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School

Central School of Ballet

Circus Space

London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art

London Contemporary Dance School

Northern School of Contemporary Dance

Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance

Royal Academy of Dramatic Art



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