

University College Falmouth incorporating Dartington College of Arts¹

by Victoria Pérez Royo

Dartington College of the Arts has a long tradition in art education. It plays a leading role in the field of Performing Arts and has an international reputation in the field of experimental arts practices. Currently, it is in the process of merging with the University College Falmouth and will leave Dartington for Cornwall. In the University College Falmouth the Performance Studies offered in Dartington will function alongside other courses in art, design and media.

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Date of opening: 1961

History:

In the 1930s artists from Europe came when the Bauhaus was broken up by national socialism. Since then, in Dartington, there has been art making and also art education, although only informally; it was in 1961 when Dartington became an official art education institution.

Postgraduate degrees offered:

Validated in 1998 as a programme:

MA Choreography

MA Devised Theatre

MA Performance Writing

MA Visual Performance (Time Based Practices)

MA Contemporary Music

¹ We would like to thank Marc Leahy, David Williams, Gillian Wylden and Cara Davis for assisting us in the creation of this report.



Validated in 2006:

MA Contemporary Arts Practice and Dissemination

MA Arts and Ecology

MA Arts Management

MA Curating

MA Engaged Practices

MPhil PhD Research

Postgraduate studies are based on individual experimentation with a great emphasis on inter- and cross-disciplinary collaboration. They offer an environment of experimentation and innovative performance work across a wide range of practices and disciplines.

All the different disciplines at postgraduate level share the same structure, learning methodologies, elements and criteria of assessment. In this report we are focusing only on the disciplines that are more intimately linked to performance practices: Devised Theatre, Performance Writing, Choreography and Visual Performance. For Contemporary Arts Practice and Dissemination, see Report on L'animal a l'esquena.

Professions the degrees prepare students for:

Performer, choreographer, writer, writer for the stage and screen, and professional activities such as theatre making, acting, arts administration, project management, teaching, PhD research, media and community art practices, work in performance and live arts.

Specificity:

The master's courses investigate the different compositional forms, processes and creative methodologies used for making performance in parallel with conceptual, contextual and theoretical enquiries in the context of an engagement with an array of the permanent staff, their associates and numerous visiting artists.

Aims:

- To integrate the student's performance practices with relevant theoretical discourses, interweaving conceptual/ practical methodologies and critical tools.
- To expand the students' knowledge and understanding of performance-making practices. They will be engaged in questions of performance research that will inform and shift their practice.
- To expand the possibilities of each discipline through dialogue and interaction with the other areas of creative practice and discourse.



- To determine and challenge the boundaries of contemporary performance practice. The programme is engaged with modes of contemporary arts practice where work often encompasses a range of media and manifests itself in a multiplicity of outcomes.

Student's Profile:

These are programmes designed for students or practitioners in these different fields: movement-based languages and compositional forms in MA Choreography; methods of composing material for live performance in MA Devised Theatre; practice using writing, text, or language as a medium in a contemporary arts context in MA Performance Writing; and visual art time-based media and performance in MA Visual Arts. The candidates are interested in finding ways to develop a critical art practice, to inform and unfold their future careers and to investigate within a cross-disciplinary performance framework in dialogue with the other disciplines, a framework in which existing conventions are challenged and boundaries are continuously tested.

Total number of current students in all Master's level: 45-50

In the older programmes (those founded in 1998) there are on average around 7 students per year. In the new ones around 3. The numbers vary considerably from year to year.

The fact that the first part of the course is common for all Master's Degrees permits these programmes to exist; otherwise it would be almost impossible to maintain that fluctuating number of students in each specialization.

Admission requirements for regular students:

Previously achieved degrees: bachelor's degree in the related disciplines to each one of the programmes.

For artists candidates without bachelor's degree: a substantial body of professional work with equivalent competence, in both in praxis and theory.

Required submission materials:

Application form

Curriculum vitae

Videos, dvd's and/or web-based documentation of previous work

Motivation and research proposal

Selection procedure:

Evaluation of the proposals and the submitted work

Interview for most or all applicants.

Evaluation's criteria:



The candidates must be capable of researching, thinking, talking and writing about practice at postgraduate level.

Financial aspects:

Registration fees: 3940 £ (4380 €) full-time students

Grants:

The main source of funding for UK students is the Arts & Humanities Research Council. Each year two or three students receive grants from this institution.

There is also a fund of money which helps with the payment of half of the fees. These monies are granted on merits not financial need.

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION²

Duration of the programmes:

1 year (45 weeks) full-time

2 years (90 weeks) part-time

Total number of credits: 180 credits (90 ECTS)³

Credits distribution

Taught modules: 60 credits

Development of individual project: 120 credits

Modules / Structure with credit distribution

Part 1: 60 Credits (30 ECTS)

(October-February)

Modules

- Diagnostics and Methodologies. 20 Credits (10 ECTS)
- Critical Theories. 20 Credits (10 ECTS)
- Questions of Practice. 20 Credits (10 ECTS)

Part 2: (Final Project) 120 credits (60 ECTS)

(March-September)

Individual work with tutorial guidance, feedback and technical advice.

² The courses, its structure, learning methods, evaluation and assessment criteria are explained in the Dartington web page (www.falmouth.ac.uk), as well as in the documents that Marc Leahy has kindly facilitated us with: MA module descriptors. At some points the texts here are merely reproduced. Master's in Arts. University College Falmouth. 2009 Postgraduate Prospectus; Dartington. Taught Master's Programme. Handbook 2008 - 2009; MA Module descriptors. Draft 08-09; Dartington College of Arts MA Programme. Generic marking bad descriptors: Criteria for assessments- all modules. At the indicated places, some parts of these texts are here merely reproduced; occasionally they are paraphrased.

³ The equivalence between UK credits and the ECTS is based on a ratio 2 UK credit: 1 ECTS credit, although in general terms the student's work load can be compared to that of the European MA student.



- Performance-making. (40, 60 or 80 Credits) (20, 30 or 40 ECTS)
- Written dissertation. (40, 60 or 80 Credits) (20, 30 or 40 ECTS)

Learning Approach

The learning process is based on the independent work of the students, integrated in a cross- and interdisciplinary framework, in continuous dialogue with supervisors, teaching staff and fellow students. Learning takes place through engagement in the reflection on one's own work and in critically thinking about the other's research. Immersion in an inter- and cross-disciplinary process of dialogue.

There is an intimate integration between theory and praxis throughout the whole programme.

Detailed description:

PART 1 is composed by three modules

Two of them are compulsory for all MA degrees and imparted together: Diagnostics and Methodologies and Critical Theories. The third one, Questions of Practice, is specific to each discipline.

DIAGNOSTICS AND METHODOLOGIES ⁴

The student develops research strategies which can then be applied to their field.

This module is designed to underpin an approach to master's level study, which works for a productive relationship between practice and theory through systematic self- and peer-evaluation and an engagement with a range of methodologies for learning, practice and research. It enables the student to identify learning needs at a master's level; to plan and negotiate an appropriate and manageable proposal for a master's dissertation and practice within an awareness of the range of methodological possibilities.

Learning methods: ⁵

The students undertake process of self-evaluation leading to plans; prepare and deliver presentations; support a peer in the preparation of a presentation; receive and manage feedback; attend to and offer feed-back to peers; critically consider methodologies; formulate proposals.

Seminars, workshops, sessions of presentations.

⁴ MA Module descriptors, p.1.

⁵ Ibid., p.2.



Elements of assessment:

- A presentation about their work: a sort of self diagnostic mapping given their interest, energy, skills and a possible development of work on Part 2. The student receives input and informal feedback from students working in other areas. They also receive written feedback from two students. The students submit the reports they have obtained and the reports they have written as a part of the assessment.
- A formal proposal for Part 2 Dissertation and Practice, with rationale, bibliography, commentary and other specified supporting materials.

Assessment criteria:⁶

Evidence of clear self-diagnosis, drawing on feed-back and a knowledge of precedent and relevant conceptual debate. Satisfactory articulation of the theory/practice relation in one's own and others' work. Presentation of a coherent and defensible proposal for a programme of study, showing awareness of a range of methodologies for learning, practice and research. Satisfactory application and evaluation of a range of procedures and methodologies for learning, practice and research.

QUESTIONS OF PRACTICE

Specific to each degree.

This module enables the students to acquire and develop appropriate skills, knowledge of processes for expanding their practice as well as their conceptual and practical framework for what the chosen discipline might be.

It starts by establishing a shared understanding of each student's practice. The workshops are designed to address these practices through ongoing tasks that are both staff and student led. Peer-led analysis and feedback become important elements in the development of practice.

Learning methods:

A series of (from 3 hour a 1 week) workshops designed to open processes of reflection on the chosen field and led by members of the team, associate lecturers and visiting artists. It is complemented by opportunities for students to lead sessions. Ongoing performance-making and the development of new work is central to this module through tasks, practical exercises and assignments.

Staff will present (or lead the student towards) specific models and case studies. The student researches specific models and undertake a number of small-scale practical exercises designed to test out models and their implications.

⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

There is no single pattern for learning methods, but different modes of presenting a range methods, strategies, languages, and models of practice. The module is focused around methods, strategies and ways of exploring and generating a proposal.

Elements of Assessment:

Portfolio of documentation with critical commentary.

Assessment criteria:

Quality of engagement with materials, forms, media and their signification; quality of (re)presentation of work and clarity of understanding of particular issues for practice within the chosen discipline; quality of analysis, documentation and evaluation of procedures and models for work; appropriateness of strategic decision-making and development of skills.

CRITICAL THEORIES

Compulsory for all MA Students

This module⁷ is designed to ensure that the theoretical issues emerging within the student’s practice can be located in relation to current arts discourses. It is concerned both with the methodological implications of theoretical enquiry by practitioners as well as with specific bodies of theory. It addresses the possibilities and limitations of shared theoretical discourse across subject fields. Linked to this it poses questions about the relation of subject-specific fields of enquiry to contemporary philosophical, scientific, artistic, and critical debate. Additional focused readings related to the specific disciplines are offered alongside these wider models of discursive practice in other fields.

Learning Methods:⁸

Seminars, which include peer discussion, explore areas of discourse currently seen to be of particular relevance to contemporary arts practice. These will be geared towards enabling each student to frame and enrich their own specialist research material, from the point of view of both practice and theory.

Students are responsible for close-reading of a range of texts which address specialist issues at a wider cultural level. Prescribed texts must be read in advance of sessions. Students submit a short essay and bibliography task early in the module for feedback. Students prepare and deliver a seminar paper on a particular text or particular theoretical issues, making reference to relevant examples of practice. Each student goes on to submit a written paper which examines a particular theoretical issue, making detailed use of existing literature.

⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁸ Ibid., p. 6.



Seminar series, group sessions and individual tutorials ensuring a coherent programme and the opportunity for equal student participation.

Elements of assessment:

A paper of 4500-6000 words at the end of the module.

Assessment Criteria:⁹

Appropriateness and range of research for the preparation of the written research paper; appropriateness and range of topic in terms of scale of task; quality and explication of a conceptual framework, its location in an intellectual context and the exploration of its relevance to an arts practice; quality of argument and its formulation and the observation of reference and research protocols.

Class Frequency:

Monday, Tuesday on a weekly basis from October to February. Study after February is usually self-managed. The students organise their schedule, negotiating access to facilities and equipment and appointments with tutors.

Mondays: all students together in a large group participate in the shared modules, presentations, proposals and theoretical research.

Tuesday: the work is organised in small groups, teaching seminars, leading workshops and attending to practice sessions and workshops.

The rest of the week is dedicated to individual work or other occupations besides the MA Studies.

PART 2: (FINAL WORKS)

The described research and practical work leads towards a final public practical project and a dissertation which constitute the two modules of Part 2.

(the ratio is decided by the student)

Modules: Practice and Dissertation

PRACTICE

Practice represents the culmination of the practical work on the master's programme. This is an independent practical enquiry, undertaken in a supportive environment, with tutorial guidance and feedback and technical advice. The student is expected to bring to bear the critical engagement of Part 1 modules on the own practical decisions and procedures to conceive, propose, plan, develop and carry through an original work within their own chosen field(s) of practice.

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

Formal requirements:

- Practice: A presentation of work in a form appropriate to the modes and forms of the practical work, together with a framing statement (500 – 1000 words).
- A framing statement (500 – 1000 words), which can take the form of programme or catalogue note, should be provided in all cases. This may be an integral part of some forms of presentation.

Accepted formats:

Every format is accepted, from studio-based to site-based work, installed work, live representation of a body of work, solo or collaborative.

Public showing of the work: yes

Evaluation criteria: ¹⁰

Artistic quality of practical work as presented in a public context commensurate with professional practice; appropriateness and suitability of the selection and location of work for exhibition or performance; strategic and tactical judgments made in engaging with the materials, techniques and conventions in the chosen field of practice; appropriateness of scale of project in relation to credit weighting.

Examining Board:

Composed by two internal supervisors.

Financing:

There is a budget for practical projects.

The students can apply for a grant to get further support for their work.

DISSERTATION

It draws from Part 1 and from the student’s own practice. The student engage in research methodologies and conceptual enquiries leading to a written dissertation. A distinctive characteristic of the dissertation in this programme is its close relation to the practical project. The students are expected to choose a topic which has a relevance to their practice that can be made explicit. The students develop different approaches to the same subjects; in this process they can identify vectors and similarities which are not based simply in the content, but in methods and strategies of research.

The dissertation is not a commentary on one’s own praxis; it can assume many different forms, such as: examination of examples of practice which are directly relevant to the practical investigation; philosophical investigation on some topics that are linked to the practical work; analysis of case

¹⁰ From *Generic marking band descriptors: Criteria for assessments. DARTINGTON COLLEGE OF ARTS, MA Programme.*



examples of other artists' related work; work out of some theoretical questions that are related to their research; testing out some questions that had been tried in the studio.

Formal requirements / Accepted formats:

Dissertation of between 10,000 and 18,000 words (depending on number of credits)

18000 words paper: 80 credits

14000 words paper: 60 credits

10000 words paper: 40 credits

Assessment criteria: ¹¹

Clearly identified and expressed research task with evident rationale; application of appropriate methodology(ies); evidence of appropriate reading; argument located in relation to appropriate fields of reference; clear articulation and explication of key concepts and frames of reference; appropriately structured and clearly expressed argument; compliance with protocols for presentation; appropriateness of scale of project in relation to credit weighting.

Examining board

Two internal tutors at minimum.

Number of final projects per year: 25-30

Competencies obtained by the student on completion of the degree: ¹²

be intelligently and productively self-critical

identify your own learning needs and set out to address them

understand the range of appropriate research methodologies and procedures for arts practice and be strategic in your choice and application

develop and sustain a body of practical work that itself provides evidence of the other outcomes in this list

find out about, and talk and write about, contemporary practices in forms appropriate to both topic and context

RESEARCH MPhil/PHD

¹¹ MA Module descriptors, p. 8.

¹² Dartington. Taught Masters Programme. Handbook 2008 - 2009, p. 16.



Currently there are two models running: one at the Dartington Campus and another one at the Woodlane & Tremough Campuses; they have different regulations and validation models. The second is focused on art, design and media subject areas. This report concentrates on the first one, dedicated to Performing Arts, which follows the regulations of the University of Plymouth.

Professions the degree prepares for:

Teaching activities within the Higher Education Sector. Professional practice in the field of Performing Arts.

Admission requirements for regular students:

A degree or equivalent combination of academic and professional experience.

Application materials:

Application form and research proposal.

Learning Approach:

The programme focuses on interdisciplinary and practice-led research.

The research will be attached to one of the field areas: Art, Choreography, Music, Theatre or Writing, but the students' research projects are usually interdisciplinary.

Structure:

The first 18 months of study, The Postgraduate Research Student Foundation organises a series of seminars intended to help the students identify the appropriate research methods and organise and structure their research. These seminars are also conceived as a way to put the student in contact with the wider researcher community of Dartington.

The rest of the study time is left for the students to individually develop their research.

Assessment:

Tutorial guidance and supervision from at least two members of the teaching staff in two different subject areas. The timetable of meeting with supervisors is negotiated by the student with the mentors.

Final project.

Practice-led research in which their own creative practice plays a relevant role; documented creative work can contribute to the final thesis, alongside the main written component.

It builds up following the MA research structure.

TEACHING STAFF



Departmental Structure:

The College is divided in the fields of choreography, music, theatre, writing and art. In each one of them there is a group of tenured staff and also specific staff coming as visitors to give presentations, workshops or tutorials in seminar modules.

The percentages of tenured and non-tenured staff varies in each field.

The work load is mainly assumed by tenured staff:

- diagnostics and methodologies is imparted exclusively by tenured staff.
- the practice area is taught mainly by tenured staff with some visitors
- theories and critical research is a mixture: 2/3 is imparted by tenured staff and 1/3 by visitors.

Required professional qualifications:

Most part of the teaching staff are practitioners and are as much as possible engaged in the art field as artists, curators, managers, etc.

RESEARCH GROUPS

There are three research groups in Falmouth University. In the merging process they will encourage ways of working together with the Performing Arts Master's programmes.

- Automatic: Research into 3D Digital Design Production.
- RANE (Research in Art, Nature and Environment). This group has already started working more closely with the arts & ecology MA.
- iRes Research in Network Art. One possibility for the future developments would be to create a strong area focusing on performance technologies.

CONTEXT

ACADEMIC NETWORK

Exchanges and guest students through Erasmus, Socrates.

Interuniversity Master's CAPD

EXTERNAL NETWORKS

The link to professional contexts is assured in three ways:

- The artistic engagement of the teaching staff. The leaders and teaching staff lead a number of projects and they facilitate the students getting involved in professional practice and



participating in these networks.

- The students are encouraged to organise a number public events during the year and to take part in public conferences. These activities are partly financed.
- A high number of students are already practitioners. They are developing their research and for a period of time they their work is produced within the framework of Dartington. In that sense, these already established professional companies develop a link to the Master's.

Visibility:

- At the end of the year the presentation of the final projects take place.
(It is a mixture between festival and assessment period)
- Half of the students participate in public events outside of the programme.
- In the campuses conferences are also often organised, mainly by the research and doctoral groups.
- The Open Days are conceived for possible candidates to have an opportunity of gaining a more detailed view of the educational programmes at Dartington.

INFRASTRUCTURES

Rooms for theory classes / Laboratories / Rooms for individual work / Audiovisual studios, hall for presentations / library.

SELF ASSESSMENT

There are two main ways of self assessment in Dartington: all modules include at least one opportunity for students to give feedback to staff on the quality of the module. There are also Student Perception Questionnaires with annual frequency.

