

ITALIA CONTI

Access, Widening Participation and Diversity Policy

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Reviewed by:	Internal Quality (Audit Lead)
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Contents

1) Italia Conti Access, Widening Participation and Diversity statement.....	3
2) Diversity at Italia Conti.....	3
3) ‘Black Lives Matter’ / Race	4
4) Access, Widening Participation and Diversity strategies:.....	5
5) Aims.....	5
5.1 Widening Recruitment and Access activity:.....	5
5.2 Outreach Activity:.....	5
5.3 Initiatives include:	5
6) Targeted Widening Participation Initiatives (examples)	6
6.1 Regional auditions with reduced fees (Federation of Drama Schools initiative)..	6
6.2 Regional auditions and fee waivers.....	6
6.3 Audition Fee Waivers.....	6
6.4 Educational and community outreach events.....	6
7) Vocational Careers Events	7
8) Admissions.....	8
8.1 Equality in the admissions process	8
8.2 Regional auditions and reduced audition fees.....	8
8.3 Bursaries and Scholarships	8
8.4 Stage scholarship (Academy of Theatre Arts).....	8
8.5 DaDA awards (Trinity L6 Professional Diplomas).....	8
9) Staffing.....	8
10) Monitoring and Review.....	9

1) Italia Conti Access, Widening Participation and Diversity statement

Italia Conti is committed to enabling people from all backgrounds and ages to access high quality performing arts training, regardless of age, ethnic origin, disability, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status.

Italia Conti are fully committed to providing equality of opportunity for all across and within every aspect of our activity through a broad range of outreach activities, admission strategies and on-course support strategies. We recognise that the arts are integral to the lives of all people and essential to healthy, vibrant and equitable communities.

We welcome applications for admission from all sections of society, and are non-discriminatory, in line with the Equality Act (2010) and Equal Opportunities Policy. Italia Conti is fully committed to developing initiatives that reduce barriers to specialist performing arts training.

2) Diversity at Italia Conti

Italia Conti considers diversity and inclusion to be central to performing arts training and we are fully committed to celebrating diversity and working to enrich and fulfil the creative potential in all our students.

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that everyone is unique and recognizing and celebrating our individual differences regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, disability, pregnancy or maternity, religion, beliefs or ideology. It is the exploration and celebration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment.

The terms equality, inclusion and diversity are at the heart of this statement.

'Equality' means ensuring everyone has the same opportunities to fulfil their potential free from discrimination, and that the curriculum does not disadvantage any student or group of students because of their background or characteristics.

'Inclusion' means ensuring everyone feels comfortable to be themselves and feels the worth of their contribution.

'Diversity' means the celebration of individual differences amongst the student cohort and workforce, and the facilitation of an environment in which all students and employees feel welcome in the Italia Conti community.

Italia Conti actively supports diversity and inclusion and ensure that all our students and employees are valued and treated with dignity and respect. We want to encourage everyone in our organisation to reach their potential and seek to provide a positive working and learning environment free from discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

Italia Conti know that diversity leads to greater creativity, so we are committed to ensuring our workforce and student body reflect the diverse make-up of modern society. We strive to provide high quality training that is accessible, appropriate, and enabling.

To effectively support implementation and monitoring of policies and practices, Italia Conti makes use of **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committees** (EDICs) which consist of staff, students, and alumni; these committees feed into the various Quality Boards and directly to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

3) 'Black Lives Matter' / Race

Following the June 2020 'Black Lives Matter' movement, there was a demand that Drama Schools respond by reflecting on their processes and practices regarding Race.

EDIC meetings were held separately by the Acting Programme and Musical Theatre & Dance Programme/Courses. Both faculties were tasked with drawing up programme/course specific action plans that would be published and managed by the local Programme/Course Management Teams. The SLT attended both of the above meetings and held separate talks with Programme Management Teams, advisors, and prominent industry figures to form a clear picture of Italia Conti-wide and business changes that are needed in order to support all Italia Conti stakeholders, in particular our Ethnic Minority staff, students and alumnx.

Italia Conti have developed three race-specific action plans, two at programme/course level and one at senior management/strategic level. Together these plans set out how we will address issues of race in our business and in our training.

We believe that:

- Diversity is important for enriching training.
- Staff and students need to be safe and welcome and feel safe and welcome.
- Overt and systemic discrimination must be ended.
- 'Black-lives' matter not just 'Black-faces' on stage and screen; we value culture and history not just perception.
- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) should have the opportunity to undertake/study Ethnic Minority roles/practitioners during their training.
- Our students are talented, work hard and deserve their successes. No Person of Colour should have these successes limited or attributed to skin colour.
- 'Black Lives Matter'

Italia Conti is committed to:

- Encouraging conversations and debate about race in and around the training.
- Increasing outreach to low-participation groups but with a focus on Ethnic Minorities.
- Continuing to support applications by those facing social-economic barriers.
- Developing our curriculum and improving delivery to be more inclusive of the needs of our Ethnic Minority students.

- Engaging with educators and early career advisors to ensure that BIPOC believe that training and a career in the performing arts is possible.
- Working to increase the diversity of staff, particularly those in teaching and pastoral care positions.
- Delivering training for staff and students on unconscious bias and microaggression.
- Listening, and doing more

4) Access, Widening Participation and Diversity strategies:

Italia Conti is fully committed to developing initiatives that reduce barriers to training and encourage greater access and wider participation, including from underrepresented groups in Higher Education and specialist performing arts training.

5) Aims

Our aims include:

5.1 Widening Recruitment and Access activity:

- To provide representation and promotion of Italia Conti to direct markets of students/providers that have students that would be near to or meet the entry criteria to study on our courses.
- To provide solutions to access barriers, such as online auditions, reduced audition fees and scholarships.
- To represent Italia Conti as a competitor in the vocational training market, persuasion to apply and enrol on Italia Conti courses.

5.2 Outreach Activity:

- To build markets by inspiring young children to take up performing arts.
- Engage young people who would otherwise not have access to arts provision.
- To promote activities that allow young people to understand that arts is a possible training or sustainable career choice in the future.
- Use arts as an engagement tool to break down culture barriers, mind-sets, physical and mental health issues and create a sense of belonging through shared activity or teamwork.
- Normalise unhealthy discriminative barriers to allow young people to participate in arts activities.
- Use arts as a medium to educate and engage young people and learn new transitional skill bases.

5.3 Initiatives include:

- Increased outreach to low participation groups, including ethnic minorities.
- The introduction of audition fee waivers for those facing socio-economic barriers.
- The establishment of Equality and Diversity committees across Italia Conti consisting of staff and students, which report to Course and Academic boards, influencing curriculum, delivery and environment.

- Reviewing content and delivery of training to enhance opportunities for ethnic minorities students.
- Engaging with early educators and early career advisors to ensure that future students from all backgrounds feel that training and a career in the performing arts is an option.
- Implementing Race Action plans to increase diversity and inclusion across the organisation. These are publicly available on the [EDI page](#) on the website.

6) Targeted Widening Participation Initiatives (examples)

Examples of targeted widening participation initiatives to areas with historic low engagement with Higher Education and specialist vocational training:

6.1 Regional auditions with reduced fees (Federation of Drama Schools initiative)

Italia Conti recognises that the cost of auditioning for drama schools, dance and musical theatre colleges can be prohibitive, involving audition fees, travel and accommodation. We have been instrumental in pioneering an initiative in conjunction with the Federation of Drama Schools (FDS) targeting applicants from areas with historically low levels of HE participation, and low socio-economic demographic. Applicants from designated postcodes can audition for three drama schools for the reduced fee of £30 for all three auditions. For Italia Conti, this means that applicants can audition for three courses at the same time and for the same reduced cost.

6.2 Regional auditions and fee waivers

Italia Conti also hold regional outreach for auditions and interviews, in order to mitigate the costs of auditioning for potential applicants. Outreach events, for example, in Cardiff and Northern Ireland, include the opportunity for support through a pre-audition workshop on audition techniques, and in some cases, audition fee waivers, as well as the opportunity to audition regionally, and so reduce costs to applicants.

6.3 Audition Fee Waivers

Italia Conti advertise that audition fee waivers are also available for applicants demonstrating financial hardship to access auditions.

6.4 Educational and community outreach events

Access and participation work includes youth outreach, specialist recruitment drives and targeted opportunities. Currently, Italia Conti work with over 20 schools and organisations to meet our primary EDI targets and objectives. Projects such as working with underrepresented

groups vary by geographical location, ethnic and financially disadvantaged communities across the UK. Examples include:

- A range of Youth performance partnerships, including:
 - **Artistry Youth Dance Company**- a not-for-profit organisation that offers free dance training for young black dancers.
 - **Impact Dance**- a not for profit, community funded dance organisation that provides opportunities for young people from deprived communities to engage in street and contemporary dance,
 - **UEL Youth Theatre Project**- a group of 6 Saturday projects that are funded by UEL and community funding. The groups work out of theatre spaces in priority engagement areas in London.
- **Careers advice and workshops** - Italia Conti also offer career advice, workshops and breaking down barrier work with young people.
- **'Challenge and Inspire'** outreach to learners on college and foundation courses, linked to audition preparation and tickets to student performances.
- **Community performance events** including community carol concerts, VIAM (Voice in a Million) and Can You Dance, Children in Need, participation in Children in need and Comic Relief Performances, Go Fest performances.
- **Theatre in Education tours**, including touring a show to the Edinburgh and / or London Fringe Festival and dance and drama TIE shows to London colleges and schools.
- **Performance fee waivers** for the local school children and FE students to attend performances to encourage recruitment and access.
- An increase in the number of online you tube classes on our website.
- The development of virtual workshop opportunities for those who cannot travel to London.
- The introduction of Careers Guidance opportunities from Year 8.
- The development of audition tours and first round online audition options.
- Recruitment drives and experience workshops are delivered in priority area schools in London such as Lewisham, Havering and Newham.
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7) Vocational Careers Events

Italia Conti also participate in a range of national events targeted at providing information, guidance and advice to prospective students who are interested in pursuing a career in the performing arts.

Such events may include:

- free workshops and performances;
- careers guidance;
- talks on financing study in the performing arts sector;
- Q&A.

Examples of such activities include the Move It! Exhibition, Perform! (in Northern Ireland) and the annual careers conference for CDMT (Conference for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre Training).

8) Admissions

Italia Conti has a range of strategies in place to support widening access and increase participation and operates equality within the admissions process.

8.1 Equality in the admissions process

Italia Conti will audition every applicant who meets, or is predicted to meet, the prior educational achievement criteria for their chosen course; there is no pre-selection in the admissions process. To ensure fairness and objectivity, auditions are conducted through a panel system, and all audition scores are moderated. Applicants are selected on the basis of their talent and potential to develop the skills required for their chosen profession. Audition procedures are reviewed and moderated annually.

8.2 Regional auditions and reduced audition fees

Italia Conti recognises that the cost of auditioning for drama schools, dance and musical theatre colleges can be prohibitive, involving audition fees, travel and accommodation. Italia Conti operates a number of regional audition initiatives, some of which may include reduced audition fees or fee waivers. First round online audition options were introduced as a result of the pandemic, but have been maintained, to support accessibility and reduce the cost of associated travel and accommodation audition costs.

With the integration of new technology, Italia Conti is now able to evaluate the impact of our recruitment marketing applications, applicants and recruitment process outcomes. Data collections now produce heat maps of areas of high / low application, offers and acceptances, the demographics of applicants, including EDI, gender equality, age and regional comparisons to inform our access and participation objectives and approach.

8.3 Bursaries and Scholarships

Bursaries are awarded at the discretion of the management, but may include the following:

8.4 Stage scholarship (Academy of Theatre Arts)

Italia Conti Arts Centre participates in The Stage national scholarship scheme, which enables applicants to access fully funded training.

8.5 DaDA awards (Trinity L6 Professional Diplomas)

Italia Conti participates in the DaDA government means tested DaDA scheme, which supports students in Dance and Drama training with living costs and tuition fees.

9) Staffing

Italia Conti is an equal opportunities employer and positively encourage applications from suitably qualified and eligible candidates regardless of sex, gender, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief. In fulfilment of this, Italia Conti partner with a not-for-profit organisation in the sector, 'Creative Access', to ensure that job advertisements reach diverse groups.

10) Monitoring and Review

Strategies for Access and Widening participation are reviewed on an annual basis across the organisation, and in conjunction with Italia Conti's degree awarding collaborative partner, the University of East London.

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