

ITALIA CONTI

Access, Widening Participation and Diversity Statement

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Italia Conti Access, Widening Participation and Diversity statement

Italia Conti is committed to creating a diverse, inclusive environment where all students – regardless of ethnicity, disability, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age or socio-economic background – can access conservatoire-style training. Equality, diversity, and inclusion are at the heart of our core values, and we work to ensure that this is valued throughout the Italia Conti community through widening participation and engagement.

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.

We 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. Our Access and Participation Plan supports this, with a dedicated budget for outreach, specialist recruitment, and targeted opportunities for under-represented groups.

1. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Italia Conti

Italia Conti considers equality, 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 terms equality, inclusion and diversity are at the heart of this statement.

‘Equality’ means ensuring everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential free from discrimination, and that the curriculum does not disadvantage any student or group of students, or member of the Italia Conti community, because of their background or characteristics.

‘Diversity’ means the celebration of individual differences amongst the student cohort and workforce, and the nurturing of an environment in which all students and employees feel welcome in the Italia Conti community. It means promoting an environment that welcomes, respects and values diverse backgrounds, cultures, thinking, skills and experience.

‘Inclusion’ means ensuring everyone feels comfortable to be themselves and feels the worth of their contribution. It is providing a space where everyone has equal, un-barriered access to opportunities and resources; where everyone feels valued and accepted. Italia Conti is dedicated to creating a safe environment where all students and staff feel supported to reach their potential with an equal sense of belonging, and in which the rights and dignity of all are respected.

Italia Conti actively supports equality, diversity and inclusion and **strives to** 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.

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).

2. Principles

Italia Conti is committed to:

- Widening participation across all programmes to currently underrepresented groups in the theatre and related arts.
- Increasing access for Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) applicants, those with disabilities, and individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- Continuing to support applications by those facing socio-economic barriers.
- Reviewing and developing our curriculum and improving delivery to ensure it remains inclusive, accessible, and reflective of diverse experiences.
- Engaging with educators and early career advisors to ensure that applicants from underrepresented groups, including members of Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) communities, believe that training and a career in the performing arts is possible for everyone.
- Encouraging conversations and debate about intersectionality in and around the training.
- Working to ensure that all managers and staff understand their responsibility to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion and where necessary undergo appropriate training about systemic and endemic racism, inequality and unconscious bias.
- Conducting our complaints and reporting procedures in a culture of transparency.
- Working closely with our peer organisations across the sector in partnership through dialogue and collaboration to address racism, inequality, and injustice and to develop our practices.
- Working to increase the diverse representation of staff, particularly those in teaching and pastoral care positions.
- Ensuring that all members of the Italia Conti community feel safe.

All Staff, Students, and Visitors to Italia Conti are expected to abide by the principles set out in our Equal Opportunities Policy and in this Access, Widening Participation, and Diversity statement, and to support Italia Conti in its delivery.

3. Access, Widening Participation and Diversity Aims and 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.

3.1 Widening Participation Aims:

As part of our drive to widen participation and increase access in performing arts training at Italia Conti, we aim to

- inspire young children to take up performing arts.
- engage young people who would otherwise not have access to arts provision.
- promote activities that allow young people to understand that arts is a possible training or sustainable career choice in the future.
- use the performing 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 the performing arts as a medium to educate and engage young people and learn new transitional skill bases.
- provide solutions to access barriers, such as online auditions, reduced audition fees and scholarships across earlier skills training opportunities, not just at 16+ and 18+ entry points.

In order to do this, we also encompass the following objectives:

- 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 bursaries and scholarships.
- To represent Italia Conti as a competitor in the vocational training market, persuasion to apply and enrol on Italia Conti courses.

3.2 Access, Widening Participation and Diversity strategies and initiatives:

Strategies and initiatives include the implementation of **structures** to support development, and **initiatives** to increase diversity and to promote access and inclusion.

Structures implemented include:

- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer:** Italia Conti have a dedicated EDI Officer whose role is to provide support, advice and guidance for staff and students across the full breadth of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. They facilitate initiatives and offer guidance alongside developing and implementing strategic policies, practices and actions plans.
- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) :** Our EDIC is well established and helps to hold Italia Conti accountable and make significant changes across the organisation. The EDIC attend monthly meetings and enter a proactive

discourse, and members are collectively tasked with the continued implementation of the EDI Action Plan. Within the committee, sub-committee action groups are focused on specific areas. These have included the development of a cross-practice gender-inclusive language tool, initiatives to support our LGBTQI+ community, Neurodiversity awareness and 'Project Period,' addressing access to free, zero plastic products for staff and students who menstruate. The EDIC (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee) supports student societies including the Conti Diversity Network (CDN), a student led society that celebrates global majority students, targeting diversity, inclusion, and community.

- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Steering (EDIS) Group:** this staff steering group receives reports and suggestions from the EDIC and has oversight of the EDI Action Plan.
- **With a focus on recruitment,** Italia Conti work closely with Creative Access, a leading diversity, equity, and inclusion organisation who provide support and development for talent from communities under-represented in the creative industries.
- **Italia Conti also maintain an EDI Action Plan** which is under constant review and ongoing development. We acknowledge that one policy, person or single committee cannot be responsible for 'Equality, Diversity & Inclusion.' It is a collective responsibility and is embedded across all of Italia Conti's policies, procedures and working practices.

3.3 Initiatives to promote access and inclusion include:

- Increased outreach to low participation groups, including those from diverse ethnicity, low socio-economic backgrounds, and those with disabilities.
- The introduction of audition fee and course deposit fee waivers for those facing socio-economic barriers.
- The establishment of a scholarship and bursary programme which attracts talented students who might not otherwise consider vocational training and supports access to training for those from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- The establishment of a hardship fund to support students in financial need during their studies.
- Review of the content and delivery of training to enhance opportunities for Global Ethnic Majority (GEM) students, and those from underrepresented groups, and support inclusion.
- The introduction of online first-round auditions, audition fee waivers, scholarships, bursaries, and free or subsidised short courses.
- Applicants with disabilities or neurodiverse needs are offered personalised meetings and visits, both pre- and post-application, to discuss reasonable adjustments.
- We also engage with early educators and career advisers to ensure young people from all backgrounds see performing arts as a viable path.
- Our EDI activity includes staff and student engagement through committees and events, as well as training on anti-racism, gender inclusion, mental health, and inclusive language.

- Our national network of Associate Schools supports talent development in under-represented areas and offers bursary-linked awards to support progression into training.

3.4 Targeted outreach Educational and community outreach events

Our 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. A range of Youth performance partnerships, including:

- **Outreach Partnerships** - Since 2020, we've expanded outreach through partnerships with organisations such as The BRIT School, BOA, NYT's Playing Up, Impact Dance, Artistry Youth Dance, and SK Dance School. These collaborations give students early exposure to professional training and audition routes.
- **Outreach Workshop Programme**- We offer free workshops in Acting, Musical Theatre, Dance, and Acting Through Song to schools and colleges across the UK, alongside tutor Q&A sessions to demystify conservatoire training and support applications.
- **Vocational Careers fairs advice** - Italia Conti also offer career advice, workshops and breaking down barrier work with young people and demystify conservatoire training.
- **'Challenge and Inspire'** outreach to learners on college and foundation courses, linked to audition preparation and tickets to student performances.
- **Emerging Talent Programme** – one Sunday a month, held at the Italia Conti premises in Woking, designed to discover, nurture, and develop the next generation of exceptional performers in Musical Theatre and Dance and to provide talented young individuals with access to outstanding vocational training, expert mentorship and begin to develop a direct relationship with Italia Conti.
- **Community performance events** including community carol concerts, open sharings in the Woking community area.
- **Theatre in Education tours**, including touring a show to the London Fringe Festival
- **Performance fee waivers** for the local school children and FE students to attend performances to encourage recruitment and access.
- **Virtual learning** - An increase in the number of online you tube classes on our website and the development of virtual workshop opportunities for those who cannot travel to London.
- **Audition Preparation**- short courses to support students in the specific requirements and expectations of the performing arts audition proves.
- **Summer School and Short Courses**- Italia Conti offer a range of prevocational intensive courses which introduce and prepare students for full-time vocational training.

4. Equality in the admissions process

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

4.1 Fee waivers

First round online audition reduce associated audition costs such as travel and accommodation. First round online audition options were introduced in response to the pandemic, but have been maintained, to support accessibility and reduce the cost of associated travel and accommodation audition costs.

4.2 Bursaries and Scholarships

Italia Conti have established a scholarship and bursary programme through the Italia Conti Trust.

Scholarships

There are a limited number of Scholarships available for full-time training annually and these are given at the discretion of the directors. The scholarships vary in value, ranging from a percentage of the fees up to the full cost. Scholarships may differ from student to student and are awarded based on their performance during the audition process. Scholarships are always for tuition fees only on the Diploma courses. Applicants can apply for a scholarship when completing the Italia Conti course application form, and information is clearly available on the website.

Bursaries (Trinity L6 Professional Diplomas)

Italia Conti also awards a limited number of bursaries to students from low-income families. Once accepted onto the course, students are able to complete a means tested application that allows their household income to be assessed. An Italia Conti bursary can range in value from a percentage of fees up to the full cost of tuition. Bursaries are reassessed each academic year.

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.

5. 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