

ITALIA CONTI

Access and Widening Participation Policy

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This Policy will be reviewed by the Policy Steering Group and AQB every two years, and additionally where there are relevant legal or operational changes, or where issues arising from its operation indicate a need for earlier review.

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1) Introduction

- 1.1. Italia Conti is committed to widening access to conservatoire-style performing arts training and supporting students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds to enter, continue and succeed in specialist education.
- 1.2. We welcome applications from all sections of society and operate a fair and non-discriminatory admissions process in line with the Equality Act 2010 and our Equal Opportunities Policy. We are committed to identifying and reducing barriers to specialist performing arts training, particularly for groups currently underrepresented in higher education.
- 1.3. This policy sets out Italia Conti's approach to access and widening participation, including outreach, admissions accessibility, financial support, student support and progression activity. It supports the institution's Access and Participation Plan by describing the principles, structures and activities through which Italia Conti identifies and reduces barriers to opportunity.
- 1.4. Our aim is to improve access, support student success, and enable progression into sustainable careers for all students, regardless of background, circumstances or prior opportunities may otherwise limit their ability to participate in specialist performing arts training.

2) Principles

Italia Conti is committed to advancing equality of opportunity across all areas of its activity. Our approach is underpinned by the following principles:

- **Widening participation:**
We seek to expand access to our programmes for groups that are underrepresented in higher education and specialist performing arts training, including students from Global Ethnic Majority backgrounds, disabled and neurodivergent students, and those from low socio-economic backgrounds and low HE participation areas.
- **Reducing barriers to access:**
We work to identify and reduce financial, geographic, informational and structural barriers that may prevent prospective students from accessing training, applying to Italia Conti, or progressing successfully through the admissions process.
- **Raising awareness and aspiration:**
We engage with schools, colleges, educators, careers advisers and community organisations to increase awareness of performing arts training and careers, particularly among learners who may not otherwise see specialist training as an attainable pathway.
- **Fair and accessible admissions**

We are committed to admissions processes that are transparent, consistent and accessible, and which allow applicants to demonstrate talent, potential and trainability.

- **Student success and progression**

We recognise that widening participation extends beyond entry. We aim to support students to continue, succeed and progress into sustainable careers through appropriate financial, academic, wellbeing and progression support.

- **Transparency and accountability:**

We monitor access and participation activity through relevant institutional governance structures, including the Widening Participation Committee and academic quality routes, to support evaluation, accountability and continuous improvement.

- **Sector engagement and collaboration:**

We work in partnership with peer organisations across the sector to widen HE participation and address inequality, share good practice, and support collective progress.

3) Access and Widening Participation 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 and young people to take up performing arts.
- engage young people who would otherwise not have access to arts provision or specialist training pathways
- promote activities that allow young people to understand that arts is a possible training or sustainable career choice in the future.
- reduce discriminatory, cultural, financial and structural barriers that may limit participation in arts activity
- provide practical solutions to access barriers, including online auditions, reduced audition fees, bursaries and scholarships across earlier skills training opportunities, not only at 16+ and 18+ entry points.

3.2 Widening Participation Core Objectives:

To achieve this, we will focus on the following core objectives:

Outreach, awareness and aspiration

To widen awareness of specialist performing arts training and careers among learners, families, schools, colleges and community partners, particularly where students may have limited prior access to high-quality performing arts provision or sector-specific information, advice and guidance.

Preparation and progression into training

To support prospective students to develop the skills, confidence, knowledge and readiness required to progress into specialist performing arts training, including through outreach activity, short courses, emerging talent activity, audition preparation and partnership work.

Accessible and fair admissions

To reduce practical, financial, geographic and informational barriers in the application and audition process, and to ensure admissions decisions are transparent, consistent, inclusive and focused on talent, potential and trainability.

Financial access and continuation support

To reduce the impact of financial barriers on access, participation and continuation through appropriate use of fee waivers, bursaries, scholarships, hardship support and other targeted financial measures.

Inclusive student success

To support students from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds to continue, achieve and progress by identifying barriers to success and strengthening academic, pastoral, wellbeing, disability, transition and learning support arrangements.

Evidence and evaluation

To use data, student feedback, evaluation, governance reporting and sector evidence to monitor access and participation activity, understand impact, identify emerging risks and inform continuous improvement.

3.3 Our outreach and engagement interventions include:

- **Strategic outreach partnerships:**
Since 2020, we have expanded our partnership work with organisations including The BRIT School, BOA, NYT's *Playing Up*, Impact Dance, Artistry Youth Dance, and SK Dance School. These partnerships provide early exposure to vocational training and create accessible pathways into audition and recruitment processes.
- **Outreach workshop programme:**
Delivery of free workshops in Acting, Musical Theatre, Dance, and Acting Through Song to schools and colleges across the UK. These are complemented by tutor-led Q&A sessions to demystify conservatoire training and support informed application.
- **Targeted information, advice and guidance (IAG):**
Participation in vocational careers fairs and delivery of dedicated sessions focused on progression into performing arts training, including addressing perceived and practical barriers to entry.
- **Pre-application engagement and attainment-raising activity:**
The *Challenge and Inspire* programme supports learners on further education and foundation courses through audition preparation, exposure to training expectations, and access to student performances.
- **Sustained talent development:**
The *Emerging Talent Programme*, delivered monthly at our Woking campus,

provides structured training, mentorship and progression support for young people with high potential, helping to build a sustained pipeline into higher education.

- **Community engagement and cultural participation:**
Delivery of accessible public performance activity, including community concerts, collaborations with organisations such as The Lightbox Gallery (Woking), and open sharing events. These initiatives aim to widen participation in the arts and strengthen community engagement.
- **Schools and touring activity:**
Theatre in Education work and touring productions, including performances at regional and fringe festivals, to extend reach and engagement with younger audiences.
- **Financial support for participation:**
Performance ticket and participation fee waivers for school and further education students to reduce cost-related barriers to engagement and support progression.
- **Digital and blended access:**
Expansion of online provision, including YouTube-based learning content and virtual workshops, to increase access for students unable to travel.
- **Audition preparation and short-course provision:**
Targeted short courses and summer schools designed to prepare students for the specific requirements of vocational auditions and support transition into full-time training.

4) Access and Widening Participation - Strategy and Governance

4.1 Italia Conti's approach to access and widening participation is supported by institutional structures that enable strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation, accountability and continuous improvement.

4.2 Access and participation activity includes, but is not limited to, outreach, information, advice and guidance, applicant support, admissions accessibility, financial support, student continuation, student success and progression. These areas are delivered across multiple teams and functions, ensuring that access and participation is embedded in institutional planning rather than treated as a standalone activity.

4.3 This policy supports Italia Conti's wider access and participation arrangements, including the Access and Participation Plan where applicable. The Access and Participation Plan sets out the institution's assessment of risks to equality of opportunity, targets, intervention strategies, investment, evaluation activity and monitoring arrangements.

Key structures include:

Widening Participation Committee

The Widening Participation Committee supports the development, monitoring and evaluation of access and participation activity. It considers relevant data, evidence, student feedback, intervention activity and progress against agreed objectives. The Committee supports the

identification of actions required to reduce barriers to access, continuation, success and progression. The Committee also holds the operational oversight of the Access and Participation Plan.

Access and Participation Plan (APP)

Italia Conti maintains an Access and Participation Plan, as required by the Office for Students. The plan sets out the institution's approach to improving equality of opportunity across access, student success and progression, including the risks identified, the activities designed to address them, and the methods used to monitor and evaluate impact.

Academic Quality Board (AQB)

Academic quality, student experience, continuation, outcomes and progression themes arising from access and participation activity are reported to the Academic Quality Board.

Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Board of Directors

Operational, resource, regulatory, financial, reputational or strategic risks relating to access and participation are escalated through senior leadership and Board governance routes where required by institutional governance arrangements.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion alignment

Access and participation activity intersects with equality, diversity and inclusion, but is governed separately from the broader EDI framework. Relevant themes may be shared with EDI governance structures where they relate to inclusion, discrimination, representation, belonging or institutional culture. The EDI and Equal Opportunities Policy sets out Italia Conti's broader commitments and responsibilities in relation to equality, diversity, inclusion and non-discrimination.

5) Mapping to risks to equality of opportunity

- 5.1 Italia Conti's access and widening participation activity is designed to address barriers that may limit entry to, participation in, and progression from specialist performing arts training.
- 5.2 Italia Conti's Access and Participation Plan identifies priority risks to equality of opportunity in four connected areas: access for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and areas of low higher education participation; access for Black and Global Majority students; mental health, wellbeing and continuation within intensive vocational training; and cost pressures, financial hardship and the affordability of specialist training.
- 5.3 In the context of audition-based conservatoire-style provision, these risks may be shaped by unequal access to prior training, audition preparation, confidence, information and guidance, financial resources, visible role models, and familiarity with professional progression routes. They may affect whether prospective students apply, progress successfully through audition and admissions processes, enrol, continue, succeed and progress from training.
- 5.4 The Access and Participation Plan, the detailed assessment of risks to equality of opportunity, together with associated targets, intervention strategies, evaluation activity and investment commitments, is set out in that plan.
- 5.5 This policy provides the overarching institutional framework for access and widening participation. The Access and Participation Plan provides the detailed regulatory plan

for identified risks, objectives, intervention strategies, targets and evaluation arrangements.

6) Admissions and Auditions

6.1 Italia Conti is committed to fair, transparent and accessible admissions and audition processes that support equality of opportunity and minimise unnecessary barriers to entry.

6.2 Admissions and audition arrangements are designed to enable applicants to demonstrate talent, potential and capacity to develop the skills required for their chosen course or professional pathway. This includes clear applicant information, consistent assessment criteria, appropriate moderation, contextual consideration where relevant, and reasonable adjustments for applicants with disabilities or additional needs.

6.3 Italia Conti recognises that applicants may have had different levels of prior access to training, audition preparation, specialist guidance and financial support. The institution therefore seeks to ensure that admissions processes are accessible, clearly explained and focused on potential and trainability as well as current attainment.

6.4 Measures such as online audition options, accessible applicant guidance, audition preparation activity, fee waivers, travel support or targeted applicant support may be used where available and appropriate to reduce practical, financial, geographic and informational barriers.

6.5 Detailed admissions requirements, audition arrangements, assessment criteria, moderation processes, contextual consideration, reasonable adjustment arrangements and applicant support processes are set out in the Admissions and Auditions Policy and relevant course or applicant information.

7) Financial Support and Scholarships

7.1 Italia Conti recognises that financial barriers can affect access to training, participation in preparatory activity, continuation, student success and progression

7.2 The institution may use a range of financial support mechanisms to reduce these barriers, including audition fee waivers, bursaries, scholarships, hardship support, subsidised activity, travel support and other targeted support where available and appropriate.

7.3 Financial support may be used to support access to preparatory activity, reduce barriers in the application and audition process, support students during study, and assist continuation where financial hardship may otherwise affect engagement, attendance, wellbeing or progression.

7.4 The purpose of this support is to help ensure that cost does not unnecessarily prevent applicants or students from accessing, continuing or succeeding in specialist performing arts training.

7.5 Eligibility criteria, application processes, award values, reassessment arrangements and any course-specific financial support schemes are set out in the Financial Support and Scholarships Policy, relevant applicant or student information, and, where applicable, the Access and Participation Plan.

8) Evaluation and Monitoring

8.1 Italia Conti monitors access and widening participation activity to understand its effectiveness, identify emerging barriers, and support continuous improvement.

8.2 Monitoring may include review of applicant, offer, enrolment, continuation, completion, progression and student outcome data, alongside student feedback, evaluation of intervention activity, financial support uptake and relevant sector evidence. Where appropriate, this monitoring will consider the experiences and outcomes of students from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups.

8.3 Access and participation activity is reviewed through relevant institutional governance structures, including the Widening Participation Committee and academic quality routes. Themes relating to academic quality, student experience, continuation, outcomes or progression may be reported to Academic Quality Board. Operational, financial, resource, regulatory or reputational risks may be escalated through Senior Leadership Team and Board routes where appropriate.

8.4 Italia Conti maintains an Access and Participation Plan, and evaluation and monitoring arrangements for plan targets, intervention strategies, investment commitments and expected outcomes are set out in that plan. Evaluation findings may be used to inform future planning, including whether activity should be continued, expanded, retargeted, redesigned or stopped.

8.5 The institution will review access and participation activity periodically to ensure that it remains proportionate, evidence-informed, aligned with institutional priorities, and responsive to student, applicant and sector insight.

9) Publication of Plan and Transparency Information

9.1 Italia Conti is committed to providing clear, accessible and accurate information about access and widening participation activity.

9.2 As Italia Conti maintains an Access and Participation Plan, the plan and related information will be published in accordance with applicable regulatory requirements. Published information may include the approved plan, student-facing summaries, evaluation updates, progress information, and relevant transparency information required by the Office for Students or other relevant bodies.

9.3 Information about access and participation activity may be shared through the institution's website, applicant information, policy pages, financial support information, student voice channels, partner briefings and other appropriate communications.

9.4 Published information will use clear and accessible language, and will be reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains accurate, current and aligned with approved institutional policies, regulatory requirements and applicant or student-facing guidance.

9.5 Where evaluation findings are published, they will be presented proportionately and will use aggregate, non-identifiable data. Care will be taken not to identify individuals or small groups, particularly where information relates to disability, mental health, financial hardship, student support, retention risk or small course cohorts.

10) Policies and Wider Documentation

- Admissions and Auditions Policy
- Financial Support and Scholarships Policy
- EDI and Equal Opportunities Policy
- Access and Participation Plan
- Relevant course, applicant and student information.

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