

Auditions and Fee Waivers – From 2022-23 entry onwards

Introduction

One of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama’s key aims is to increase and secure access to training for the most talented applicants regardless of their background. The audition and interview fee waiver scheme is intended to ensure that financial barriers do not limit the ability of talented applicants to apply to our Schools. This scheme was previously funded by our Access Agreement commitments and now by our Access and Participation Plan Commitments. As such, it is targeted at applicants from particular backgrounds. As part of its commitments, in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 the Conservatoire funded 140 audition or interview places for applicants from low income households (under £25,000 household income). Priority was given to State School or college educated applicants, those from Black and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds, those who declare a disability and care experienced or estranged applicants.

In the October 2020 meeting of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD) Widening Access and Diversity Committee (WADC), the administration of auditions and the CDD fee waiver audition fee waiver were discussed. The on-going COVID-19 crisis had necessitated a pivot online for many school auditions and subsequent planning for the 2021-22 entry has been complicated by continual uncertainty.

The following highlights measures taken by CDD schools for the 2021-22 entry; the subsequent effect of these on the CDD audition fee waiver and some recommendations for the future administration of auditions and fee waivers.

CDD cannot and will not impose any recommendations upon any schools. Each school must decide what best suits their art form, their applicants and the overall circumstances of both. The below is intended to highlight best practice and to offer suggestions for the year ahead.

COVID-19 and 2021-2022 auditions

The below table summaries how schools are intending to operate their undergraduate admissions for the 2022-23 entry

School	Cost	Process of Audition
BOVTS	£25	First round online auditions Second round onsite recalls with remote back-up if further lockdown measures announced
CSB	£25	First round online auditions Second round onsite recalls with remote back-up if further lockdown measures announced
LCDS	0	First round online auditions Second round as face to face workshops
NCCA	£25	Onsite auditions with remote back-up if further lockdown measures announced
NSCD	£20	First round online auditions via zoom sessions Second round on-site auditions for shortlisted candidates (reduced numbers and audition length) with option for remote audition via video submission (overseas or for some/all if further lockdown measures)
Rambert	£50	First round online auditions Second round onsite

In summary, the majority of schools have reduced their audition fees by at least 50% and will be conducting their first rounds of auditions online.

Audition Fee waiver for 2021-22 entry

As part of its commitments, the Conservatoire has historically funded 140 audition or interview places for applicants from low income households (under £25,000 household income). These 140 audition fee waivers were split amongst the schools based on size and demand.

For the 2020-2021 entry, the fee waivers were allocated as follows:¹

School	BOVTS	CSB	LCDS	NCCA	NSCD	Rambert
Waivers	41	21	26	9	26	17
Proportion of Waivers	29%	15%	19%	6%	19%	12%

In the past, each CDD school has charged £50 for their auditions, leading to a sum of £7,000 being ringfenced for audition fee waivers. Given that schools are now varying their audition fees, with one removing them entirely, the decision has been taken to allocate schools a reserve of funds for fee waivers rather than simply several fee waivers.

The below has been calculated for the 2021-2022 entry. The £1300 usually reserved for LCDS fee waivers has been distributed amongst the remaining schools proportionally.

School	BOVTS	CSB	NCCA	NSCD	Rambert
Proportion	36%	19%	7%	23%	15%
Funds	£2506.17	£1296.30	£518.52	£1641.98	£1037.04
Waivers	100	52	21	82	21

CDD will therefore be offering a total of 276 fee waivers. It should be noted, however, that as eight schools demand for a fee waiver never exceeded 166 applicants and as six schools 119. While it remains to be seen if widespread online auditions will increase demand by removing the barrier of travel, it is likely that, across the board, CDD will not use all the funds currently earmarked for audition fee waivers.

Terminology of process

Currently, there is significant a variety of language used by CDD School to refer to the assessment process students undergo and the related fee for this.

School	Term for fee	Term for process
BOVTS	Application for fee on website Assessment fee on admissions policy	Audition
CSB	Application fee	Video Audition
LCDS	Application Fee	Video Admissions Task (for App) Admissions Workshop (for recalls?)
NCCA	Application fee	Audition
NSCD	Application Fee	Audition
Rambert	Application Fee	Audition

¹ It should be noted that, if a school does not fill their allocation their remaining fee waivers are distributed to other schools based on applicant demand.

This variety of language may prove confusing to potential applicants.

Recommendations for 2022-23 entry:

1. It is recommended that going forward, Schools use the term Application fee to refer to costs paid at time of application, as is already the case, and that the Audition/Interview Fee Waiver become the Application Fee Waiver.
2. It is recommended that a single term, for example 'admissions process' or 'admission procedure', be adopted by all Schools to refer collectively to auditions/interviews/other admissions assessments. Schools would then be free to specify what their admissions procedure/process is, for example:
 - a. The X admissions procedure consists of an online video preliminary audition. Successful applicants will then be invited to take part in onsite recall auditions.
3. Given the unprecedented nature of admissions in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, it is recommended that all Schools undertake an evaluative exercise to determine whether changes made to accommodate the pandemic (such as online auditions and subsequent lowering of application fees) have had an effect of admissions. In particular, schools are encouraged to ascertain if these changes worked to remove barriers faced by student groups who are underrepresented.
 - a. The Widening Participation and Equality Coordinator can assist to any data analysis exercises to this end.
4. It is recommended that all Schools have, at a minimum, a robust online, remote audition system planned to anticipate any local and national lockdowns that might occur as a result of the ongoing pandemic. These plans should be published online alongside all application and audition information.
5. It is recommended that all Schools seriously consider the viability of blanket online first round auditions or a blended model as a standard into the future. CDD will not make this a requirement but would merely encourage exploration of this to address any potential barriers posed by travel.
6. It is recommended that all School consider lowering their audition fees to £30 or less to ensure that there is equity across CDD.
7. It is recommended that, should overall demand be below the number of fee waivers of offer, the remaining sum should be repurposed into a travel reimbursement fund.
 - a. This would open after all application deadlines have passed and would be administered centrally. Applicants with the greatest need and who have travelled the greatest distances will be prioritised for reimbursement. Applicants would be able to claim back a percentage of the travel to one audition (preliminary or recall dependent on school).
8. Many schools operate their own fee waiver schemes, it is recommended that all schools evaluate the effectiveness of these schemes and consider whether funds could be better used for travel bursaries and similar. Ideally, CDD and individual School fee waiver schemes should complement each other rather than compete.