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# 1. Introduction

This guide is designed for anyone who is interested in disability issues at the eight affiliate schools of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama. It seeks to provide helpful information about the process of applying for a place at a Conservatoire school, the support that you can expect at your audition or interview and, for those who are offered a place, during your course.

It also provides helpful information for staff, those planning to take a short course at one of the schools, or for members of the public who have an interest in the work of the Conservatoire.

Of course, if you are a student you won't always know what you will need before you apply or at the start of your course and the aim of this guide is to try to answer some of your questions. You will find further information on the Conservatoire website and each school has its own prospectus and website. There may also be additional information about one or more of the Conservatoire schools in the folder at the back of this guide.

Throughout this guide you will find examples of what disabled students have to say about their experiences of studying at the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama. On the Conservatoire website there are film clips of these students involved in the creative work that is at the heart of training for a career in the performing arts.

## What is the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama?

The Conservatoire for Dance and Drama ([www.cdd.ac.uk](http://www.cdd.ac.uk)) is one of the newest and most exciting higher education institutions in the country. It was established in 2001 to secure the future of conservatoire-level vocational training in dance and drama in

England. It has a unique structure, made up of eight affiliate schools. All are small, specialist, vocational training institutions with international reputations for high quality training in dance, drama, technical theatre or circus arts.

Through the Conservatoire, all the affiliate schools receive funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. This helps to ensure that the most talented students benefit from vocational training regardless of background or financial circumstances.

## The affiliate schools of the Conservatoire (referred to as 'schools' throughout this guide) are:

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School:  
[www.oldvic.ac.uk](http://www.oldvic.ac.uk)

Central School of Ballet:  
[www.centralschoolofballet.co.uk](http://www.centralschoolofballet.co.uk)

The Circus Space:  
[www.thecircusspace.co.uk](http://www.thecircusspace.co.uk)

The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art: [www.lamda.org.uk](http://www.lamda.org.uk)

London Contemporary Dance School:  
[www.theplace.org.uk](http://www.theplace.org.uk)

Northern School of Contemporary Dance:  
[www.nscd.ac.uk](http://www.nscd.ac.uk)

Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance:  
[www.rambertschool.org.uk](http://www.rambertschool.org.uk)

Royal Academy of Dramatic Art:  
[www.rada.org](http://www.rada.org)

All of the affiliate schools are small and this means that we are able to offer a



supportive and friendly environment where you will be well known by the staff. This makes it easier for schools to provide support which is designed for your individual needs.

### **What is the Conservatoire policy on disabled students?**

The Conservatoire welcomes applications from disabled people and judges applicants solely on their talent and potential to develop the skills required for their chosen profession. We are committed to admitting and supporting disabled students and warmly encourage you to inform the school so that appropriate support can be put into place as soon as possible.

In the past, disabled people have not always been given an equal chance to develop their talents and skills in the performing arts and our aim is to remove any unnecessary barriers to your teaching and learning.

The Disability Discrimination Act means that Higher Education Institutions are not allowed to treat disabled students 'less favourably' than their non-disabled peers for reasons relating to their disability without proper justification. You also have the right to expect 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that you do not face any unfair disadvantages in relation to your learning or other aspects of student life. The Disability Equality Duty (2006) requires us to proactively promote equality for disabled people.

In addition to these legal rights, the Conservatoire recognises that everyone is an individual and will do its best to develop your talents and skills. Schools have found many imaginative and innovative ways to anticipate and respond to the needs of disabled people with the talent and enthusiasm for the highest level of training in acting, circus arts, dance and technical theatre.



### How are students selected?

It is the Conservatoire's policy to invite all applicants to attend an audition or interview. In order to make this process as fair as possible, it is important for you to let us know what kind of support you think that you might need at this stage. There is a space on the application form for you to tell the school of any impairment or condition, for example dyslexia or other learning difficulty, a physical or sensory impairment or a long term medical or mental health condition that might have an impact on your audition or interview process, or on subsequent training. It is the school's responsibility to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made so that there are no unnecessary barriers to you achieving your full potential.

### Who should I ask if I have an enquiry about the course or selection process?

If you have any concerns or issues you would like to discuss before you apply, you should contact the school (or schools) you are considering. We recognise that you may not know what you will need at this stage and each school has at least one member of staff who can discuss the audition/interview process with you so that you can decide together what kind of support would be helpful. With your agreement, they will then

pass on this information to the relevant senior member of staff.

You will find the name of the person to contact either on the school's website or in its prospectus and there are links to this information on the Conservatoire website. There may also be additional information from individual schools in the folder at the back of this guide

### How will this information be treated?

We acknowledge that you may wish to discuss personal matters and anything you raise will be treated in confidence and only discussed with other members of staff with your permission.

### Who is included in the term 'disabled person'?

The Disability Discrimination Act protects those people who are defined as disabled according to the definition in the Act. This definition of disability is: 'a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.' This includes people with visual, hearing and mobility impairments, those with learning difficulties, including specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia,



those with enduring mental health conditions such as depression and long term disordered eating ('enduring' means of at least six months duration and likely to continue), long term medical conditions which may be progressive such as cancer and HIV, and conditions which affect learning and social skills such as Asperger's Syndrome or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). It also includes people who may have 'hidden' impairments or medical conditions which may fluctuate such as asthma, epilepsy or diabetes.

If you have a condition which you do not consider to be a disability but which you think it would be helpful for the school to know about, you can discuss this in confidence with the Registrar, Head of Studies or your personal tutor before it is discussed with anyone else. You do not need to be 'registered' as a disabled person to be covered by the Act.

### **The social model of disability**

The Conservatoire uses the Social Model of Disability and this is the perspective which helps us to form our policies. The 'Social Model' takes the view that society creates barriers that 'disable' people from participating fully and on an equal basis with others and that wherever possible, these barriers ought to be removed. Conservatoire schools have a

commitment to removing unnecessary barriers during the application and audition or interview process and throughout the course, and to providing appropriate support so that all students can achieve their full potential.

### **What kinds of support will be available to me?**

The schools that make up the Conservatoire are small. Although this means that we may not have all of the specialist resources available in large universities, the advantage is that students are known personally by all their teachers and wherever possible we offer support tailored to your individual needs.

The training you will receive is mostly based on practical and creative work in the studio and theatre environment. There are also elements of theoretical or academic work where you will need to develop your skills in reading, writing, research and note taking. We will work with you to identify potential barriers to developing skills in all aspects of your training and do what we can to remove them. Dyslexia is by far the most commonly disclosed impairment, but we also have experience of training students with a wide range of impairments and conditions.

Schools can assist UK students in their application for the Disabled Students' Allowance and in finding specialist help.



Image courtesy of London Contemporary Dance School

## 2. Disclosure of Confidential Information

### Sharing confidential information

Information about disability is considered 'sensitive information' and in order to comply with both the Data Protection Act and the Disability Discrimination Act, we try our best to:

- ask your permission to pass on the information in order to make it possible for reasonable adjustments to be put into place
- inform you of the procedures that are taking place
- guarantee that sensitive and other personal information is kept confidential

We understand that you may have reservations about declaring a disability or may disclose to one member of staff but ask them to keep this information confidential. However, we aim for an open

and honest culture about disability issues and encourage you to let your school know of any impairment or condition so that appropriate support can be put into place. We respect your right to decide not to disclose information, or to disclose information to one member of staff and ask for this information to be kept confidential, but you need to recognise that where this is the case, it may not always be possible to put full support in place.

### Disclosure of information

Students are encouraged to identify themselves as disabled at any point, for example, when contacting the school for the first time, on an application form, at audition, at enrolment or induction, or at any point during the course. Conservatoire level training is rigorous and will place demands on both your physical and



emotional energy and it may be that disability-related issues arise during the course that have an impact on your training. You are encouraged to discuss this with your tutor or another appropriate member of staff.

Once you have disclosed information and have agreed with the school that it would be helpful to inform other staff of this in order that you receive appropriate support and 'reasonable adjustments' to teaching and learning, you will be asked to sign a disclosure form. This gives permission for agreed information to be shared with members of staff. In order to respect student confidentiality, this information is kept in a locked file and will not be shared with members of staff other than those to whom the student has given permission. This procedure can also be used for temporary conditions that may have an

impact on your training such as an accident or injury and for other fluctuating conditions such as asthma or diabetes. It can also be used for mental health difficulties such as the onset of depression, anxiety or eating difficulties.

### **The Learning Agreement**

After you have signed a disclosure form, if this is appropriate, a senior member of staff or a dyslexia specialist teacher will meet with you to draw up a personal Learning Agreement. See page 12 for more information on this.



## Lucy Edwards (known to everyone as Ellie) is studying for her three year BA in Professional Stage Management at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School

I describe myself as dyspraxic with a strong element of dyslexia. The dyspraxic part of me means that I can't write very quickly or for very long without it becoming extremely painful and unreadable and there are some co-ordination issues too. The dyslexic part means that I have some problems with language, punctuation and vocabulary.

I used to get incredibly frustrated in primary school. When I tried to read, it just felt like the words wouldn't stay on the page and people used to laugh at me because of the way I held my pen – I kind of grab it, a bit like a chimp.

I went into college after secondary school and did a BTEC in performing arts and from there I got interested in back stage work. When I came for my interview I just felt comfortable straight away. It's a fantastic feeling to go into a major professional school and just feel immediately at home.

I must admit that the road that I've been treading has not exactly been easy. The bits of the stage management course which involve a lot of paperwork have been quite difficult for me. The second term of the first year you are set projects from everywhere. It feels like the four corners of the earth are closing in upon you and they are going to crush you unless you get it all done. But I'm

managing to get through it all. I've got a laptop, a scanner, a printer paid by my Disabled Students' Allowance and this really helps me. Without these, I would find it very hard to keep up. I've also got a dictation programme which I use for writing reports. If I go home from a long day I can sit at the computer and dictate it rather than have to physically write it.

The teachers are really helpful in the practical parts of the course. In carpentry last term we were doing a lot of jigsawing work, and my teacher got me shock resistant gloves so that I wasn't whacking my wrist out every single time it vibrates. This problem with my wrists is part of being dyspraxic and it's a really nice feeling to know that you have this problem, but with support you can still achieve your goals.

When I leave here I would really like to become a props maker. It's just one of those things that really gives me a buzz, to be able to say "I made that".

I think that no matter what kind of condition or disability you have, you've got to have the passion to be able to do something and to do it well. It's up to you whether or not you want to change that passion into a knowledge, or forever to keep it locked away in a box.



## Pete Wilmott is in the second year of a Diploma in Stage Management at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School

I've been wearing hearing aids since I was four. I've always wanted to come here but the first time I applied I didn't get a place. So I found myself some work experience on professional shows and then I was accepted the second time around.

I like to get ahead of myself so that I know what's coming up next. I tend to go to the course leaders. They know the issues that might come up for me, what to expect, and they can pass on this information to other teachers. In the carpentry and construction workshop for example, it's very noisy in there and consequently I turn my hearing aids off. So if my tutor needs to get hold of me we've worked out a way for him to give me a visual sign or make a physical contact.

Another example is in the sound department. In the past I've used one earpiece to listen to the person cueing me, but there are occasions where it's much easier to concentrate on what's going on if I have two earpieces. We talked about it and did some research and the school got some dual muff headsets for me.

I'd like to be a lighting designer because with lighting designing you're very visual and I'm really good at putting a visual image on to stages. I love trying to work out what sort of surroundings, what sort of effects I could use.

I'm learning such a lot on this course and I think it's going to set me up very well for the future.



Images courtesy of London Contemporary Dance School

### 3. Application, Audition and Interview

#### Before you apply:

If you wish to apply to a Conservatoire school you will need to apply directly to the school you have chosen. There is space on the application form for you to disclose information about your impairment or condition and it is helpful to give as much information as you can. This information will be used to help the school to decide the best way to support you during the audition/interview process, and if your application is successful, throughout your course.

If you have any questions or concerns about the course, or if there are any disability-related issues you would like to discuss before applying, you are welcome to contact the school. There is always someone who is able to give you information about the audition process and the kind of adjustments that might be appropriate for you. The details of who you should contact may be in the folder at the back of this guide, or you can check in the school's prospectus or website.

#### Once the school has received your application form:

If you tell us about a disability, medical condition or specific learning difficulty on your application form, someone from the school will contact you to discuss any adjustments or support you might need. With your permission, these adjustments will be shared with members of the audition panel. In cases where your impairment or condition is unlikely to have an impact on the first stage of the audition or interview process, this discussion will take place later, either when arrangements are made for a recall audition, or once you have been offered and accepted a place at the school. At any stage of this process, disabled applicants are welcome to contact the school, (ideally by letter or email) to discuss any concerns.

## **What happens in an audition or interview?**

All applicants who wish to train as an actor, dancer or circus artist in any of the Conservatoire schools will be offered an audition, and those who wish to undergo training in stage management and technical theatre will be invited to attend an interview. Once you have applied, schools will send you information about what will happen at your audition or interview, but the information below will give you some idea of this process:

### **Audition at dance schools:**

This will include technique classes in either ballet, contemporary dance or both, and an interview. In some schools you will be asked to present a prepared solo performance piece. If you are successful at the first stage you will be invited back to attend one or more further workshops.

### **Audition for acting courses at drama schools or for circus arts courses:**

At the first audition for a place on an acting course you will be asked to perform two prepared pieces, followed by a short interview. Candidates who are successful at this stage will usually be asked to attend one or more follow up auditions and these might include: movement, singing, working in groups and sight reading.

For The Circus Space, the initial audition includes all aspects of the training: movement, theatre, acrobatics, technical skills a prepared solo performance piece and an interview.

### **Interviews for Stage Management or Technical Theatre Courses:**

For a place on these courses, all applicants will be invited to attend an interview and might also be asked to fill out a

questionnaire or other forms. There is usually only one interview for a place on a stage management or technical theatre course.

### **Applications from overseas students:**

All of the procedures described above may be adjusted for applications from overseas students. You will find this information on the school's website and in its prospectus.

### **Some examples of support that has been offered to disabled candidates (including those with dyslexia) at audition and interview are:**

- arranging for sign language interpreters to be present;
- extra time for completing questionnaires or other written material (for stage management courses);
- written material made available in a different format or larger font size;
- a tour of the building prior to audition;
- arrangements made for candidates to be in a particular position during a workshop, or to have instructions repeated.

### **Medical information**

At some point during this process, you will be asked to fill in a medical form. This is usually done after you have been offered and have accepted a place.

Because many of the courses at Conservatoire schools are physically demanding, it is helpful for the school to know of any medical condition or previous performance-related injury. This information will be used to support you in your training and will not be used in a prejudicial way. Medical information falls into the category of personal and sensitive information and is regarded as confidential.



Image courtesy of Bristol Old Vic Theatre School

## 4. Learning Agreements

### What is a Learning Agreement?

The small and friendly nature of training at Conservatoire schools means that a high level of support is available to all students and there is more individual contact with staff than you would find at a large university. However, it is often helpful for specific guidance to be given to staff about the support needed by individual disabled students.

If you have disclosed a support need, you will be offered a Learning Agreement (some schools refer to this as the Individual Extended Learning Agreement or Personal Learning Plan). This is an agreement between a disabled student and the school. It is a written statement which describes the type of support that is required and the way in which it will be provided. It is a practical and positive way of informing those teaching and working with you (and this

includes visiting professional directors or choreographers and other part time-teachers) of these decisions.

A senior member of staff or a dyslexia specialist teacher will arrange a meeting before or as near to the start of the course as possible, to draw up a Learning Agreement. With your signed permission, copies are circulated to the members of staff who are named on the Agreement.

There will be regular meetings to review this plan and to make adjustments if needed. If you feel that there are any difficulties with carrying out the support agreed, or if the support is not sufficient or appropriate for your needs, we encourage you to make an appointment to review the adjustments. Although we understand that you may feel reluctant to do this, it is in everyone's interest to ensure that your needs are being met as far as is reasonably possible.



A Learning Agreement can be put into place at any time during the course. Students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia are often identified later in the course as they begin to face new challenges in both the practical aspects of their training and (in the courses where written work is part of the assessment) when dealing with more advanced contextual or academic work.

### Examples of Learning Agreements

In the following list there are some examples of support included in Learning Agreements at Conservatoire schools. (Support designed specifically for dyslexic students is described on page 22.)

- communication support workers for a deaf student;
- asking the teacher to remind groups to speak one at a time; not speaking with their hands over their mouths;
- reminder to give both verbal and visual instructions;
- allocating a few minutes at the end of class to go over material when possible;
- for students who might find it difficult to read information on notice boards, making provision for them to receive information about meetings, room changes etc in a different way, e.g. via their pigeon hole, email or phone;
- arranging for the student to be in a particular position during technique class;
- giving out teaching material in advance and in a particular format;
- arranging for singing classes to be in an echo-free room.

## Who has responsibility for my learning and teaching?

Your school has responsibility for ensuring that reasonable adjustments are in place so that you are not put at any unfair disadvantage. However, students have responsibilities too.

Your school has responsibility for:	You have responsibility for:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>providing you with the opportunity to disclose information relating to your disability or condition in a confidential setting</li> <li>giving you information about what kind of support you can expect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explaining your needs to the school both at the start of the course, and throughout the course as the requirements and demands become clearer</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>your teaching</li> <li>your welfare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>your learning</li> <li>looking after yourself and seeking help when needed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>if appropriate, working with you to draw up a Learning Agreement</li> <li>making sure that all relevant members of staff (including part time and visiting staff) are informed of the support that has been agreed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>thinking about the kind of support that would help your learning and progress</li> <li>being proactive in seeking help – not leaving it until too late</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>arranging regular meetings with you to review and update the Learning Agreement</li> <li>informing staff of any new adjustments to the Agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>requesting review meetings if there is anything that isn't working for you</li> <li>attending any meetings that have been arranged</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>guiding you through your application for the Disabled Students' Allowance</li> <li>giving you the support you need in organising both the Psychological (diagnostic) and Needs Assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>applying for the Disabled Students' Allowance</li> <li>taking advantage of, and making time for the IT training recommended in your Needs Assessment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>helping to provide financial support for dyslexic students who require diagnostic assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>providing the school with evidence of any previous diagnostic assessments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>organising 1-1 specialist support for dyslexic students or providing contacts for you to arrange this yourself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>using your support appropriately, for example by turning up for any study support sessions arranged for you</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>organising staff training on disability issues, both general and specific</li> </ul>	



## Nadia Albina is a recent graduate of the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art

I'm an actress. I graduated last year from LAMDA and now I'm in the big wide world trying to get jobs. I was born without my right forearm – it's a congenital thing.

I always felt that it was going to be difficult because I have never been to the theatre and seen an actor onstage who has a disability but is playing a part that doesn't call for it.

When I auditioned for LAMDA I did disclose that I had a congenital disability but I didn't feel like they were looking at that at all. I felt comfortable that the audition panel were judging me on my acting.

The parts of the course that I felt might be very challenging were the physical sides. When I first saw the fighting, I did have a bit of a moment of thinking 'how am I going to do this?' because I wanted to be involved with everything that the school offers. But as soon as we started I found that the support was there. Teachers weren't thinking about what I couldn't do, they were thinking, we'll find a way of making that move work – we'll find a way of choreographing that. I never felt that there was any pressure to do it a certain way.

At one point in my training I had a prosthesis – I suggested it myself because I was in the frame of mind where I thought that if I covered up my arm, I would be more acceptable to an agent or a casting director. But in my final show I did a production where the director encouraged me not to wear it because she made me realise I wasn't myself with it on, I didn't have as much freedom in myself or my body. Since then I've gone for auditions as myself and it hasn't been a problem. I'm beginning to get work.

The best advice I could ever give some one is just to follow a dream that they've had. It shouldn't matter what you look like. You will always surprise yourself, and you will always surprise others by just being who you are.



Images courtesy of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art

## 5. The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

### Who is eligible to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance?

If you have been a resident of the United Kingdom (UK) and will face costs in your studies because you are disabled, you may be eligible to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This can cover the cost of special equipment that is necessary for your studies such as computers and software, non-medical help such as study skills tuition, sign language interpreters, readers or note takers, and ancillary costs such as photocopying. Applications for this allowance are made through your Local Education Authority (LEA). Once you have contacted them, they will supply you with information on how to apply.

Applying for the Disabled Students' Allowance can be a time consuming process and it is important that you begin this process as soon as possible. If you are a UK student and know that you have a condition or disability that requires support, it is very helpful to start this process as soon as you have accepted a place.

To be eligible for a DSA, you need to demonstrate to your LEA that you:

- can provide evidence that you have been a resident of the United Kingdom for at least three years before the start of your course;
- have been offered a place at, or are currently attending, a Conservatoire for Dance and Drama school;
- have evidence that you are disabled. For dyslexic and/or dyspraxic students this means a recent report from an educational psychologist or similarly qualified professional. For other disabled students it usually means some kind of medical evidence.

Unlike a student loan, the DSA does not have to be repaid. The Department of Education and Skills has produced a useful booklet on this: *Bridging the Gap: a guide to the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) in Higher Education*. Your school library will have copies of this booklet or it can be downloaded from [www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport/students](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport/students) and following the link to students with disabilities.

When you apply for the DSA, there is an extra procedure required for dyslexic students and those with other specific learning difficulties. Dyslexic students who are eligible for the DSA will need an assessment that has been carried out by an appropriately qualified psychologist (or other approved professional). If your school believes that you need this assessment, they will help you to organise an appointment. The psychologist will produce a written report and will send you a copy which you need to forward to your LEA.

### **How do I pay for the Diagnostic Assessment?**

For students who are being diagnosed as dyslexic for the first time, or whose diagnostic report is out of date, your Conservatoire school will help you to obtain funding for a new or updated report. Funding may be provided from the school's Access to Learning or other Hardship Funds. The Registrar, Head of Studies or Head of Student Support will talk you through the process of applying for a diagnostic assessment and put you in touch with recommended psychologists. They can also help you with the sections of the Access to Learning Fund application form that you need to complete.

### **What is a Needs Assessment Report?**

All students applying for the Disabled Students' Allowance (that is, not just dyslexic students) require a Needs Assessment Report. If your LEA has advised you to contact a specific centre, the contact details can be found on the website of the National Network of Assessment Centres ([www.nnac.org](http://www.nnac.org)). You can also ask your Conservatoire school to help to organise this appointment at an Assessment Centre near to the school. The assessor will then write a report which gives very detailed information about the

equipment and other support you require. For example, they may recommend:

- a computer,
- assistive IT software or other equipment,
- specialist one to one tuition,
- camcorder,
- support workers such as sign language interpreters, readers or note takers.

This report is sent to your LEA for authorisation. Once your LEA approves this report, you may order the recommended equipment. You do not have to return any equipment supplied as part of your DSA but you will need to get it properly insured.

Because conservatoire training is different from conventional academic degree courses, it is often helpful for both the educational psychologist and the needs assessor to know something about the practical and vocational demands of your course. A sample letter for assessors is available from your school or from the Conservatoire website.

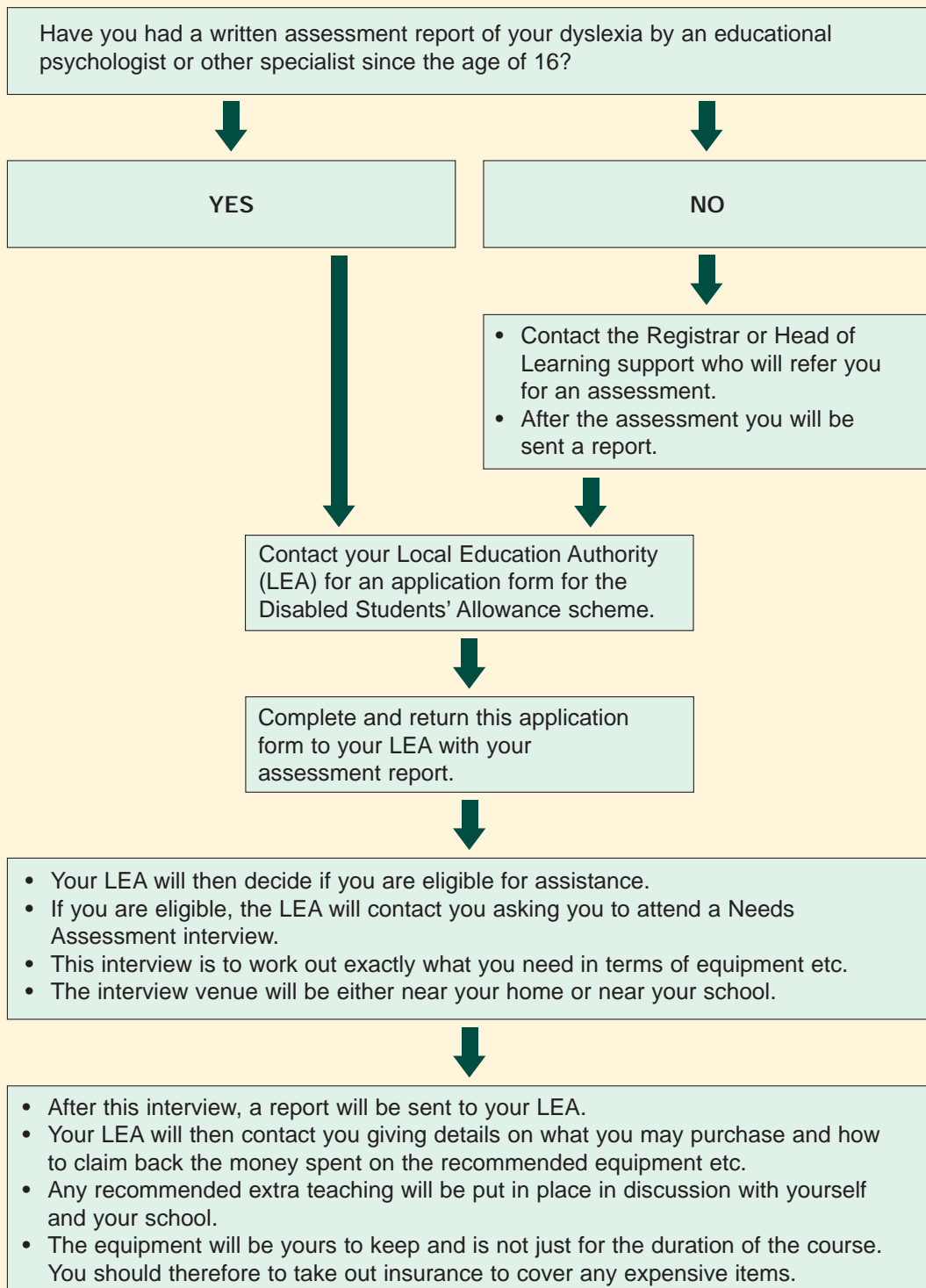
### **The DSA and EU or International Students:**

Unfortunately, non-UK students are not eligible for the Disabled Students' Allowance. If you are in this position, you should contact your own government to find out whether they provide funding to support the study needs of disabled students who are studying abroad.

### **Specific funds:**

Some schools have specific funds to assist students in financial difficulties and disabled students who are not eligible for the DSA. For information about this, you should talk to the Registrar, Student Support Officer or Head of Studies in your school.

The chart below illustrates the process of applying for Disabled Students' Allowance if you are a UK student and are, or think you might be, dyslexic:





## Stacey Abalogun is in her final year of the BPA (Hons) Degree in Contemporary Dance at Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

I wasn't diagnosed as being dyslexic until I was in the first year of the degree course here. I got referred by the Learning Support Tutor because my written work wasn't up to standard. I'd always struggled at school. I worked really hard, much harder than other people and I was always disappointed with my results. After all the tests, it came back that I was severely dyslexic.

The equipment I got with the Disabled Students' Allowance really has helped me. 'Inspiration' is a computer programme that helps you break down information. Say for instance, if I have to write an essay and have no idea where to start, I'll type in some key words and this will show me how to put this into a mind map to organise my ideas and help me structure my essay or plan a piece of writing. Also I've got 'Read and Write Gold', which is another programme where when I'm actually typing it will read it back to me.

Probably the biggest help of all is the camcorder. When I'm in technique class I'm able to record my movement or when I'm choreographing my own works, then I can look back on it and work on it at a later stage, because everything takes longer.

I have a Learning Agreement which I've signed. It highlights the positive points and the negative points about my learning and all my teachers get a copy of it. So for instance, in my case, if I need to be shown the movement more than once – because dyslexia does affect my memory of movement – I can ask my teachers to repeat a movement.

The course here – I couldn't ask for anything more. The teachers are all really good and really supportive so you know if you've got any problems or you don't understand anything at the end of class, you can always go and ask.

Once you find something in life that can take a hold of and you can devote yourself to it 100% it gives you something to live for. I wake up every morning and I get out of bed, I come and dance. I go home I'm still dancing. I work at weekends, I'm dancing. You know, it's my life. I couldn't see myself doing any other profession.



Images courtesy of Northern School of Contemporary Dance

## Ira Siobhan, pictured above, is in his final year of a Performing Arts degree at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance

I've known that I've had dyslexia since I was about seven years old. I've always found academic work difficult and I just started to use my motivation and energy in different ways – sport and physical things because that was where I could be at my best.

I was worried about doing a degree course because of all the written work, but they reassured me that there'd be a lot of support and ways we can work around it. On the open day I asked the tutor in charge of dyslexia support and she was really reassuring – she told me that a lot of people who are dyslexic go into dance like I have, so that gave me a bit of confidence. We've worked out ways for me to present my essays in a spoken form. It's not an easy option but it works for me.

At first I found it hard to keep up with ballet. I didn't have any kind of ballet background and I felt like it was holding me back.

It felt mathematical, that's the only way I can describe it – kind of like a grid or like learning numbers. But I just knew if I could get it, learn it piece by piece, add on each new movement to what I already knew, then I would improve so much more. I love ballet now.

Sometimes I have to sit back and look at what's happened over the past few years. It's gone so fast. I look back and see where I was and the changes are just crazy – physically, mentally, every way. It's not just being seen as a dancer, I've grown as a person as well. Really it couldn't have been a better environment for me – the mix of the people from all over the world, different nationalities and different races. It's been an eye opener.



## Aidan O'Reilly, pictured left, is in his second year of the BA in Acting Degree at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art

I'm an actor or trying to be an actor. The nature of my disability is that I only have one eye and in technical terms what most people see at 200 feet, I see at 20 feet, so details and things are gone.

I'm American and I auditioned at the top of the UN building in New York on my 19th birthday. Then I came to London to do the big audition workshop. When I arrived, RADA had sent out a letter with a list of all the things I needed, so everyone knew that I had a visual impairment. I think it's good that people knew what to expect and then I was able to go up to the teacher myself and let them know how comfortable I am with it.

It was fun. It was a lovely day and I remember thinking at the end of the day, I don't even care if I get in at this point, I've had such a wonderful time.

When I started the course one of my big worries was getting around the school and not getting lost. The school asked two students in my year whether they would be willing to keep an eye out for me and they picked two very different kinds of people to do it, one who's a very sharp guy, and one who's very laid back. It was reassuring to have this at the beginning and actually it was nice to get to know two people in that way.

I met up with the Dean of Studies a week before classes and we talked about what kind of support I might need. It was written up and I signed it, and this was the Learning Agreement that was passed out to the teachers before they met me. I'd never had anything like this before and it seemed a very good idea, 'cause teaching is a very vulnerable thing to do anyway and if someone kind of jumps in and goes "oh by the way, I'm half blind", they'll wanna know what to do.

I think what's wonderful about studying at RADA is that they expose you to so many different ways of working from all over the place. And you realise there is no one way of working, and that each production you do is going to be a new challenge and everyone has to go about coping in a new way. And so you just have to consistently rise to whatever the bizarre challenge is put in front of you.

I just love being with a bunch of intensely creative young people, whose energy is contagious and who are inspiring to be around.

## 6. Dyslexic Students

### What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a difficulty caused by subtle problems with language processing which are independent of intelligence, school experience, social, economic or emotional factors. Dyslexia is the most commonly disclosed impairment at the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama, as it is in other performing arts schools. Dyslexic students are often highly creative and imaginative people and with the right support they can achieve very high standards in their training.

### How does this affect learning?

The implications of dyslexia on reading and writing are now well known. They include:

- persistent, severe problems with spelling, even with easy or common words;
- problems with ordering things sequentially, such as letters, numbers, words or ideas;
- taking longer to read texts and scripts;
- needing more time to produce written work such as essays, reports, research notes and portfolios;
- misreading or miscopying;
- difficulty with multiple activities such as listening and taking notes in lectures;
- persistent problems with sentence structure, punctuation and organisation of written work;
- prone to forgetting dates, times and places of meetings and other problems with organisation and memory;

Less well known are the ways in which dyslexia can have an impact on the practical and creative side of your training. Dyslexic students studying at Conservatoire schools have spoken about their difficulty with such things as:

- remembering dance and movement sequences and routines;
- learning lines;

- making the link between seeing and doing – for example students finding themselves moving off on the wrong leg in technique or movement lessons;
- some of the practical aspects of stage management courses – for example, working with measurements, ratios or number sequences for lighting.

### What kind of support is available for dyslexic students?

Most of your assessments at Conservatoire schools are based on technique, performance or practical theatre skills. In some schools, academic or contextual essays form part of the assessment process, but students are not required to take written examinations in any of the undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. However all courses require high levels of skill in reading, writing and note-taking and schools are able to provide learning support in these areas. This support can be offered in the following ways.

#### Specialist dyslexia tutors:

Dyslexic students who receive the DSA (see page 16) are usually also entitled to one to one support from a specialist teacher. This can be organised by your school and is paid for by your LEA. The specialist tutor will help you to develop your skills in such areas as writing, organisation and memory.

#### Library, learning resources, IT facilities, assistive software:

As all of the Conservatoire schools are small, they are unlikely to have the full range of assistive software in the libraries. Dyslexic students with the DSA will have received assistive technology and the training to use it, and some libraries have equipment that can be loaned to students.



The following software programmes are available in some school libraries and there are members of staff who are happy to help you with these:

- **Inspiration:** This is a mind mapping programme which helps plan and structure written work.
- **TextHelp! Read and Write:** This is a text to speech programme that listens to the user's written work to check for grammar and spelling or to listen to long written passages viewed on the screen.

#### **Tutors and Learning Support Teachers:**

Schools have well developed tutorial systems and all students have regular opportunities to discuss any learning difficulties (both practical and academic) with their teachers as they arise. Some schools also employ a learning support tutor who can offer individual help with planning, re-drafting and writing tasks such as essays, reports and portfolios.

#### **Adjustments made for dyslexic students in conservatoire training:**

As students spend a large part of each day developing their practical and performance skills in the workshop, studio and theatre, it is often possible for adjustments to be

made as and when they arise to meet problems that have not been anticipated. For example, students in stage management courses might be shown a different way to use measuring devices or record lighting sequences and teachers often invent ways to assist students who find it difficult to learn dance notation, lines or dialect.

Some examples of adjustments that are frequently made for dyslexic/ dyspraxic students include:

- help with 'over learning' (i.e. by constant repetition) for students who take longer to learn routines, sequences and lines;
- presenting academic work in a different format, for example, an oral presentation;
- extended deadlines with written work and allowances made for grammar and spelling;
- longer lending times in the library;
- one to one study skills support.



Images courtesy of London Contemporary Dance School

**Nick Lawson, pictured above, has completed his BA Hons Degree in Contemporary Dance at London Contemporary Dance School and is now in EDge, the school's postgraduate dance company.**

I have been dance training for seven years. I'm now dancing for EDge which is a semi-professional company. It's like the next step up and this year's really been about finding who I am as a dancer.

I was very into sport at school and then I saw a professional dance company perform, and I thought, okay, something's kind of missing in the sports. It's very physical but there's also like another element to being physical, like the softness and also a way of expression.

I have been aware of being dyslexic from the age of seven. It's been a long journey to try and understand how dyslexia works in my learning process. Being dyslexic I find it hard to kind of express myself, especially in writing and sometimes in words as well – finding the right words. I find that in dance I can express myself through movement, so this is like another way of communicating – a way of understanding my mind and body and expressing who I am as a person. It's fun as well.

There were quite a few dyslexic students in my year and we took our problems to the school and said, "Okay, being dyslexic we find it hard to pick up and remember material." Then they asked permission to

tell all the teachers and I thought that's fine, because it's best for them to be aware, to understand that dyslexia actually affects not just your writing, it affects every single part of your life.

The teachers have been very supportive and very kind of strict with me. They're like "Nick, do you know what you are doing?" I'm like "Yes". And they say, "Nick, do it again." And forcing me to repeat and repeat and repeat, which then lets the material sink into my body rather than my brain.

Sequences that take other people a matter of minutes, can take me days to learn. I've learned to not panic in the class situation and just to say to myself, "it's okay that it's taking me a long time to learn this routine". I'll kind of take it down to the very basics and break it down movement by movement. So it's being very patient with myself.



## Sophie Stone is in her first year of an acting degree at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art

I wrote that I was severely deaf on my application form. The form said, 'do you have a disability, what kind of help do you require?' and nobody's ever really asked me this before. And I just thought, okay, I need to put something down and so I wrote down 'yes, somebody who signs for me and maybe a note taker.' I didn't need them for the initial, individual auditions, but when I got a place on the final workshop there were two interpreters there. It really helped. I still maintained my independence but I was able to show myself at my best.

And then I got in. I was so excited, it was like, little old me in this great place.

When I started my training I didn't know how I would cope because I hadn't had a great deal of support before coming to RADA with interpreters or communication support workers or anything like that and I wasn't really sure what to expect. There was also the feeling that there might be a stigma attached, that other students might see me as 'the deaf person,' and I'd really stand out. But if anything, the opposite has happened. Everybody has been extremely supportive, very accommodating of my interpreters.

I had communicators full time for the first two weeks and then I felt confident about being able to pick and choose the lessons

where I needed help. I realised that I need someone who is flexible, who can write notes for me, tell me where to be. It's good if they know something about acting training.

My acting teachers are all aware of my needs. Before I started the course, the teachers attended a talk where a trainer who's deaf herself came in and explained the do's and don'ts of teaching a class with a deaf student.

It's taken a while, but over time all the teachers are starting to click and remember the simple things, like turning round to face me, keeping their hands away from their faces, stepping a foot away from the window. And then it becomes so natural that it's an unconscious decision – to do something to accommodate me in the lesson.

I'm not naïve. I do know that when I'm going out there looking for work, I'm going to be seen as a deaf actress. But my sole aim is to fight that. I do not want to be Sophie Stone, the deaf actress. It's not me being ashamed of my deafness, it's me saying "okay, I'm deaf. Now can I be an actress?"



Image courtesy of Bristol Old Vic Theatre School

## 7. Mental Health and Counselling Service

The term 'mental health' describes a sense of well being, the capacity to live in a resourceful and fulfilling manner and to have the resilience to deal with the challenges and obstacles which life presents. Those who experience 'mental health difficulties' may be very successful as students studying for a career in the performing arts, but they may also require support to enable them to participate fully in a training that places great demands on both physical and emotional energy.

Leaving home for the first time, studying abroad, making new friends can all have an effect on your mental health and this can sometimes affect your ability to fully engage in your training.

Some students will have experienced mental health difficulties before starting their training and others will find that they are beginning to have difficulties with such things as concentration, motivation, stamina, creativity, attendance, eating regularly, managing anxiety or mood swings and sleep patterns. In these circumstances it is important that you seek help. Talking to your Tutor, Course Leader, Registrar or Head of Student Support is the first step.

All schools can help you to make arrangements to see a counsellor.

This service is offered free of charge. You can also self refer and this information is usually provided in your student handbook. Seeing a counsellor will give you the opportunity to work through difficult issues in some depth.

The counsellor operates a code of confidentiality set out by her or his professional body.



## 8. Buildings

Conservatoire schools are housed in a variety of buildings and use different performance spaces. Whilst all schools are fully committed to improving access, some have been newly refurbished and are now fully accessible, whilst others are still in the process of finding funding for new premises or improvements to their existing buildings. Information about school buildings can be found in the information at the back of this pack or on the school's website and prospectus.

Applicants with any kind of access issues are welcome to call the school and ask for a tour of the buildings.

## 9. Complaints

There are a number of formal and informal ways in which students can bring a range of disability related issues to the attention of the managers at Conservatoire schools. Our aim is to react positively to criticism and to improve the quality of our services.

Details of the complaints procedure can be found in the Student Handbooks of individual schools.



Images courtesy of the Central School of Ballet

## 10. Useful Contacts

### **Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities**

General advice, information and guidance about being a disabled student  
 Freephone: 0800 328 5050 – Information Service (13.30 to 1630 Monday to Friday)  
 Textphone: 0800 068 2422  
 Fax: 020 7450 0650  
 Email: [info@skill.org.uk](mailto:info@skill.org.uk)  
 Website: [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk)

### **Disability Rights Commission**

General information and advice on your rights as a disabled person  
 Tel: 0845 7 622 633  
 Fax: 0845 7 778 878  
 Website: [www.drc.org.uk](http://www.drc.org.uk)

### **Department for Education and Skills (DfES)**

Up to date information from the Government about disability support in higher education  
 Tel: 0870 000 2288 Information line for publications  
 Tel: 0800 731 9133  
 Website: [www.dfes.gov.uk/studentsupport](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/studentsupport)

Below are two dyslexia centres in the London area. For schools in other areas, see the information at the back of this guide or look on your school's website.

### **Adult Dyslexia & Skills Development Centre (London, Euston area)**

For dyslexia assessments and study skills tuition  
 2nd Floor  
 1-7 Woburn Walk  
 London WC1H 0JJ  
 Tel: 0207 388 8744  
 Fax: 0207 387 7062  
 website: [www.adultdyslexiacentre.co.uk](http://www.adultdyslexiacentre.co.uk)

### **Dyslexia Action (London, Victoria area)**

Dyslexia reports, study skills tuition and information about dyslexia and dyspraxia  
 Tel: 020 7730 8890  
 Fax: 020 7730 0273  
 Email: [london@dyslexiaaction.org.uk](mailto:london@dyslexiaaction.org.uk)  
 Website: [www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk)

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