

## **Conservatoire Framework for Contextual Admissions**



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## Introduction

The Conservatoire for Dance and Drama has developed the Framework for Contextual Admissions and Programme Design to create and support a greater and collective strength in our provision from recruitment through to graduation.

‘Contextual admissions’ is broadly understood in the higher education sector to be the practice of taking the social background of an applicant into account in the application process and admissions process for admission to a programme of higher education. The application of a ‘contextual admissions’ approach often includes reduced academic entry requirements, prioritising applicants or informing ‘borderline’ admissions decisions. The principles behind this general understanding speak to the increased emphasis in the sector on widening access and participation, and according published institutional Access and Participation Plans.

The Conservatoire has developed this Framework to create a definition of ‘contextual’ which not only takes account of an applicant’s/student’s background and social context, but also acknowledges where there may be gaps in understanding and the underpinning reasons for such gaps. From the application stage right through to graduation, the Framework is designed to:

- support and promote the creation of a partnership of understanding between students and the institution;
- embody a set of **VALUES** that all Conservatoire Schools will apply;
- establish a set of **PRINCIPLES** that all Conservatoire Schools can work to and benchmark themselves against

A key facet therefore of the Conservatoire’s approach is that the principles applied during the recruitment process should also be embedded in programme design and delivery, to establish a holistic thread running through the full life cycle of a student’s degree with a view to maximising student potential achievement and success.

The Values of the Framework are underpinned by a set of Principles that all Conservatoire Schools sign up to. Broad guidance/resources accompanying the Framework will be developed to support the implementation of those principles. Crucially, the scope of these will be sufficiently broad so as to permit Schools to have maximum flexibility in the ways in which they would work within the framework. The aim is to for the Framework to create and facilitate mechanisms for Schools to review and strengthen existing admissions structures and practices in a common strategic way, with a subsequent aim of aligning principles of programme design and development.

The Values and Principles enshrined in the Conservatoire Framework for Contextual Admissions and Programme Design are set out in this document.

Templates are included as appendices to assist Schools of the Conservatoire in benchmarking against the Framework.

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### VALUES

The values in the box below underpin the Framework:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>UNDERSTANDING:</b></li></ul>	Create a partnership of understanding between institutions and applicants from the outset of the recruitment process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>FAIRNESS:</b></li></ul>	Have a holistic multi-faceted approach to entry requirements (may include Access to HE programmes)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>EQUALITY:</b></li></ul>	Identify barriers to entry and work to mitigate these
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>SPECIALISM-INFORMED:</b></li></ul>	Ensure developments within the subject specialism explicitly inform the whole programme, from recruitment through to graduation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>INDIVIDUALITY:</b></li></ul>	Admissions selections are based on both the suitability of an applicant for the institution AND the suitability of the institution for the applicant

### PRINCIPLES

<b>1) An industry-informed approach to recruitment balancing industry needs and art form development:</b>	Keeping up to date with industry trends, norms, developments to maximise employability but also develop the art form. Contextual admissions should look at industry as the starting point, not the end game.
<b>2) Successful outcomes for the sector and wider society:</b>	Admissions decisions take into account an applicant's holistic potential to contribute to the industry sector and wider society. Programmes prepare graduates to make positive contributions to society through and beyond their artistic discipline.
<b>3) Entry requirements, selection and recruitment:</b>	The approach to this area of admissions should be multifaceted, cohesive, holistic, demystified and 'non-traditional'. Ways in which this might be achieved might, for example, be:

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ single rather than multiple auditions, complemented by additional methods of information-gathering about applicants to help reach an admissions decision;</li><li>○ remote video auditions and interviews;</li><li>○ a variety of additional information-gathering methods, such as showreels, interviews with ‘targeted questions’, personal statements that are asked to respond to ‘targeted questions’;</li><li>○ guidance for applicants issued in advance on understanding the format and purpose of:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the audition</li><li>- the interview</li><li>- the personal statement</li></ul>as relevant to the application process;</li><li>○ entry requirements that are deliberately designed to remove barriers and encourage applicants from all backgrounds;</li><li>○ additional discretionary ‘points system’ linked to APP targets for borderline cases;</li><li>○ regular reviews of programme entry requirements to identify and remove potential barriers</li></ul>
<b>4) A ‘partnership of understanding’</b>	<p>Understanding what the applicant understands is crucial in making the right choices and determining if it is right for both parties. Getting the admissions decision-makers/auditions panels to understand what the applicant understands leads to fairer decision-making. Ways in which this might be achieved might, for example, be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Ensuring staff making admissions decisions are fully conversant with the values and principles of the contextual admissions framework;</li><li>○ Initial and regular review of published information for applicants and other stakeholders (parents, teachers, schools, FE Colleges/sixth forms, social workers etc) in consultation with students and other stakeholders, to ensure maximum accessibility;</li><li>○ Working with Primary and Secondary Schools to widen awareness and understanding of conservatoire training and accessibility to this;</li><li>○ Understanding the way in which an applicant has come to apply to a Conservatoire School and considering their application process within that context.</li></ul>