

FOREWORD BY
MAGGIE NORRIS

Actors' & Performers' YEARBOOK

ESSENTIAL CONTACTS FOR
STAGE, SCREEN AND RADIO



2025

REVISED AND
UPDATED
EVERY YEAR

'A brilliant resource to have on your journey. No matter where you find yourself in your career, it can give you a new direction, tactics or focus when you feel a bit lost' **SYRUS LOWE**

*Actors' &
Performers'*
YEARBOOK
2025

Foreword by Maggie Norris

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Publisher's Note

Welcome to the 20th anniversary edition of the *Actors' and Performers' Yearbook*! This Yearbook originally began life as the *Actors' Yearbook* back in 2004 under the stewardship of the late, great Simon Dunmore, who I had the immense privilege of working with until his death in 2014. It was originally published by A&C Black, who were bought by Bloomsbury in 2002.

Inspired by A&C Black's *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook*, the *Actors' Yearbook*'s original intention, as set out by Simon Dunmore in his 2004 introduction, was to “make some more detailed sense of the ever-diversifying world of professional acting, from training to the wide range of companies offering work in all media, via the brokers (agents and casting directors) of much of that work”.

Over that time, the aim of the Yearbook hasn't changed very much at all, while the landscape that actors are working in has, of course, changed immensely. The Yearbook has, therefore, broadened its scope to include “performers” as well as just actors; to offer a survey of the wide range of work available to actors today, with many working across multiple mediums in their career; and to reflect the many ways in which actors can now navigate this world and give their work exposure.

In more recent years, we have invited an industry figure to introduce each edition and interview some of their key collaborators and contacts about their experience in the industry and what advice they would give others on that journey. You'll find all of those interviews in this Yearbook you have today.

Lastly, as the industry and society more widely finally move to prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion, we have been keen to ensure our Yearbook reflects – and even helps drive – that change, including developing our section on resources for Disabled actors and inviting contributors to the Yearbook that represent a diversity of perspectives, backgrounds and heritages.

We hope that you continue to enjoy the Yearbook and, if there's anything you'd like to see in future editions, please don't hesitate to get in touch (anna.brewer@bloomsbury.com)! We would love to hear from you.

Anna Brewer, Publisher

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Foreword

I was brought up in Bolton and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). My dad was a communist back in the 60s when that was seen to be romantic. He had this idea that we should all go and live behind the Iron Curtain and I, as a young communist, agreed. So, having found myself left stranded in bookshops in Manchester all through my childhood, I moved to Halle in the GDR and found myself stranded in shops where all the books were heavily censored and I was being followed by the Stasi, who couldn't quite believe that my family had defected to the East when everyone in their right mind was defecting to the West.

My dad not only took me to bookshops when I was growing up, he took me to the theatre: The Berliner Ensemble and the Octagon in Bolton. I loved it. And I loved dad for taking me. So, when we left the GDR, I became an usherette at the Octagon. I sat on the stairs of the auditorium every night, in a time when nobody worried about blocking fire exits, and watched Ibsen, Brecht, Strindberg and J. B. Priestley. And I dreamed big dreams of becoming an actress.

Nobody in my family was creative, except Aunty Edith who was a stained-glass artist (and thought strange), but nobody seemed to mind when I said I was going to London to seek my fortune on the stage. I lived at 187 Drury Lane in a shared flat with a girl called Hattie and got a cleaning job in Neal's Yard whilst befriending the barman at the Drury Lane Hotel who served me the dregs of all the customer's cocktails he made.

I had no training, no agent and no knowledge of the industry. So, like many actors back then, I bought *The Stage* every week and scoured the job pages. I responded to an advert looking for actors for a tour of old people's homes in Birmingham. They wanted an actor/musician and I played the saxophone just enough to land the job. This was the beginning of a career that went on to encompass acting, writing, directing and producing. It was on this journey, as I prepared to direct a musical set in a prison called *Bad Girls* for West Yorkshire Playhouse and subsequently the Garrick Theatre, that I found myself visiting a number of prisons as part of my research. I talked to a lot of people who I felt shouldn't be there. I also found that a high percentage were care experienced.

Resources for young people leaving care tend to be focussed on education, training and employment. None of which is sustainable if a young person is in crisis. Over time, I have found that the systems set up to support care leavers often belittle and reduce them in the name of helping them. They are clumsy, self-interested and overwhelmed. The point of The Big House – the theatre I went on to create – is to help them see that they deserve better and are capable of more (see page 279).

When I set up The Big House in 2012, I had no interest in managing people, and I didn't want to be defined by a CEO title, sitting at the top of a hierarchy. I wanted to be defined by the young people (they would give me the best title anyway: my nickname, Magsta) and I wanted to remain an artist – an artist that strives to be an innovative practitioner and, above all, curious. I wanted The Big House to be a place where empathy lives and where small ideas incubate in rooms to be shared in powerful immersive settings and grow into big ideas that reshape a system.

Over the last 12 years, I have been lucky to be trained by the young people I work with, many of whom we prepare for the industry. Our projects support those who have had a

challenging upbringing. That often involves stabilising their lives before developing their creativity and nurturing their long-term goals. Most of the young artists have had little support growing up. Many will have been in care and had “corporate parents” (when a child goes into care, the council becomes the “corporate parent”) or been referred from a Pupil Referral Unit for excluded children through a Youth Offending Team or a Probation Officer. Some will be introduced by our community of young artists, who know who’s at risk and in need of the long-term support we offer. All will be creative, none will be auditioned by The Big House, most will never have acted before and very few will have any knowledge of how the industry operates. This book is an invaluable guide that will help them navigate their journey to becoming a working actor.

Many of these young people did not play as a child. That may be because of abuse, neglect, violence or bereavement. So, discovering how to play and – most importantly – how to relax is the gateway to unleashing their creativity. This is important as the happiest people and the most successful actors, in my experience, are the most playful ones. They are able to experiment and have developed an ability to relax and be playful even in stressful situations, like on Netflix sets with massive crews and tight schedules or large stages with big reputations, like the NT or the RSC. At The Big House, most people have never been to the theatre and many have rarely left their postcode, so they experience theatre with us for the first time, bringing no techniques, no labels and no frames of reference. They have a fresh and child-like approach which is a constant source of inspiration. This has shaped my practice and helps me try to approach the creation of a piece of work as if I have never created anything before. It has taught me to assume nothing, to be playful and encourage people to test out ideas before dismissing them, because only by exploring every option can you uncover fresh and interesting choices. This means that we have to be vulnerable and prepared to explore choices that work less well. Creating a safe space to be vulnerable, allows us to confidently relax, often leading to the most surprising and extraordinary results. The overriding thing that I have learned from the young people at The Big House is to have no rules.

My practice, shaped by the young artists at The Big House (and my own lack of knowledge of traditional drama school techniques) is simple and easy to consume. Having entered the industry as an actor who had no training, I understand the difficulties of knowing how to begin when you have no money, no agent and no contacts in the industry. So, in this edition, is some simple advice on how to create opportunities and how to make the most of them from four inspirational industry professionals who I had the pleasure of talking to. All of them have shared reflections and invaluable insights in to the industry: the writer of *Billy Elliot*, the actress lauded for her portrayal of Whitney Houston, a rising theatre actor and star of *I May Destroy You*, and an acclaimed agent who shaped the careers of two of Britain’s biggest stars. I realised during the process of interviewing them that subconsciously I had chosen people who all have something in common: they are both humble and very playful.

There’s often a misconception about humility. People think it’s about being meek, but humility is a superpower that brings out the best in you and others. It requires you to listen and be curious. It’s also a quiet confidence in who you are and what you can contribute. To be playful is not to be trivial – it is to be open to surprise – while seriousness is a fear of the unpredictable outcome of open possibility. To be playful is to allow for the

possibility for anything to happen. If you can combine these qualities then you are capable of anything.

I have also learned that young actors sometimes think that success will heal pain and their sense of not being seen, worthy or good enough. This can lead to anxiety about how their work will be received and can inhibit their ability to relax and be playful in the process. But they are part of a growing community of artists that support each other and over time they soon realise that it is the process of making and sharing work that is healing, irrespective of its outcome. They are able to find their voices and learn to share and express their vulnerabilities in a safe environment, giving each other support and finding ways to unlock feelings that for many have been sealed off, cloaked in shame or masked by anger.

I hope this encourages you to be brave and not fearful and to seek out, or develop, the community that will support and not judge you on your journey. If you are scared by the risks associated with a career in the arts and think that you need money or privilege to be an actor, be inspired by some of The Big House alumni and the barriers that they have overcome to have successful careers.

I am going to leave you with the notes I jotted down recently in my notebook whilst I was preparing to rehearse *Between the Lines* by Jammz and James Meteyard at The Big House:

Set your ego aside. Be prepared to abandon your plans. Be open to possibility. Listen. Observe. Look for new ways of working. Carve, rather than impose, a way forward. Break your habits. Be surprising. Take risks. Remember that fear of what is happening (or what could happen) will make you tense up. Let go. Be prepared to stumble and fall. Be playful. And don't read the reviews.

Maggie Norris started out as an actress and worked extensively in TV, theatre and film. As a writer she has been commissioned by The Curve, Paines Plough, Liverpool Playhouse, Oldham Coliseum and Soho Theatre. Her plays/musicals have had several national tours and two West End runs. She has directed at West Yorkshire Playhouse, The Dukes Playhouse, Old Red Lion, BAC, Glasgow Citizens, the Royal Court and Soho Theatre. She has directed and developed 15 new plays for The Big House (www.thebighousetheatre.uk.com) and produced a feature film *Ratcliffe's Revolution* with Assassin Films.

Praise for the *Yearbook*

'The wide range of information and contacts should be a huge help to those undertaking their new journey.'

Dame Judi Dench,
Actor

'Wherever you are from and whatever your background, this book has the resources and tools that can help you navigate your way. There is a wealth of information from industry contact details to articles and interviews.'

Sam Stevenson,
Casting director

'A brilliant resource to have on your journey. No matter where you find yourself in your career, it can give you a new direction, tactics or focus when you feel a bit lost.'

Syrus Lowe,
Actor

'The *Actors' and Performers' Yearbook* is the industry's best kept secret in my view. A one-stop shop for insight and vital information. I cannot recommend it highly enough.'

Lucian Msamati,
Actor and writer

'This book is brilliant. I've been in the biz for over 30 years and I would have loved to have this when I was starting out, but I'm really glad it exists now. Bravo to all contributors.'

Paterson Joseph,
Actor

Training

Introduction

This section is largely devoted to those who are 18 and older. This is not to dismiss the fact that there is training (of varying kinds) for those under that age. However, the field is so wide that the confines of this book limit listings only to the major organisations.

Although not all professional actors have had formal training, it is nevertheless very important for today's aspiring actor to decide whether or not to do so. It is an essential fact that the acting industry works on very tight time-scales and budgets – training allows actors to better acclimate to this high-pressure environment. For instance, an untrained voice may crack after a few days of live performance and be time-consuming and costly for a management to replace (only the larger productions can afford understudies). Or, equally, a fight (in a theatre or on camera) has to be staged so that it (a) looks real, (b) is safe for the participants and (c) can be seen properly by camera and/or audience – actors who've been trained in the essentials of combat will make this staging process much quicker. Unfortunately, nowadays, the industry rarely gives aspirants the opportunity to 'learn on the job': training is vital preparation.

For today's aspiring actor, it is also important to train on a professionally recognised course. The established drama schools are the focus of such training. There are acting-related university degree courses which have a reasonable proportion of vocational training (as well as academic work) and there are numerous part-time, short-term and 'foundation' courses which will give you basic insights into the many crafts involved in acting. However, because of the intense competition, a full-time drama school course of at least a year is likely essential for most people.

For those who have already trained, there are opportunities to learn new skills and refine those already acquired, or simply to keep them in trim when the acting work is not coming in. The latter is very important, as you can be asked to demonstrate your skills at very short notice. Also, the more you can legitimately add to the 'Skills' section of your CV, the more you can enhance your chances of finding work.

Note: Under all headings in this sections, it is especially important to **check for the latest information on the relevant websites**. *Actors' and Performers' Yearbook* makes every effort to ensure that such information is correct and up-to-date, but some information is liable to ongoing amendment.

Listings in this section:

- *Training for the under-18s, page 2*
- *Drama schools, page 11*
- *Short-term and part-time courses, page 40*
- *Private tutors and coaches, page 49*

Training for the under-18s

The transition from child star to adult actor is a rocky one, and many do not succeed. There are notable exceptions – Emma Watson and Leonardo di Caprio, for instance – but they are the exceptions that prove the rule.

Generally speaking, the best thing for the stage-struck child is to send them to one of the numerous youth theatre groups and drama workshops that exist in almost every town and city. These can be widely found online or on social media, and many are members of the National Association of Youth Theatres – see below. Public productions may be the last priority of such groups – especially for the younger ages – but a terrific amount can be learnt by the young from the theatrical experience. Children in such groups won't learn many of the technical skills necessary to acting, but they will learn a lot of important social skills and the fundamental business of 'interacting' that is so important to an acting ensemble – that it's not just what you can create that matters, but what you can create with other people. Some youth theatres are allied to agencies who will promote their members for professional work, but it is important to note that employment of the under-16s is very strictly regulated.

Boden Studios

99 East Barnet Road, New Barnet, Herts. EN4 8RF
tel 020-8447 0909
email info@bodens.co.uk
website www.bodens.co.uk
X/Twitter @bodens
Principal Adam Boden

Established in 1973. A part-time performing arts school for children and young adults aged 3–19. Offers classes 7 days a week, covering acting for stage, screen acting, singing and dancing where students can earn qualifications from Trinity College, London.

British Youth Music Theatre

Mountview, 120 Peckham Hill Street,
London SE15 5JT
tel 020-8563 7725
email mail@bymt.org
website <https://britishyouthmusictheatre.org/>
Facebook /britymt
X/Twitter @britymt
Instagram @britymt

British Youth Music Theatre (previously Youth Music Theatre UK) is the UK's national company providing musical theatre activities for young people aged 11–21 across the UK. It is one of the seven National Youth Music Organisations (NYMOs) supported by Arts Council England; its core programme links young people from local/regional productions into formal training at drama school – so successful auditionees will be talented, with many going on into the creative industries. BYMT has a strong relationship with the teaching union,

NASUWT, who are its principal sponsors, and with Trinity College London, who formally assess the activities.

Auditions for young performers take place around the UK in January and February, and successful applicants join the companies of 6 fully staged productions at venues and festivals around the country in the summer holidays.

BYMT's programme includes workshops, courses, training schemes and projects that help young people develop their skills and abilities in the performing arts. This includes the opportunity to work with artistic teams to create new music theatre. BYMT also creates similar pathways for young writers, composers and musicians as well as those interested in technical theatre. BYMT offer a wide range of outreach opportunities with schools, youth services and cross-cultural groups.

Training opportunities for graduate directors, assistant directors, assistant MDs, designers and choreographers working alongside its professional staff are also available.

National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT)

c/o Friargate Theatre, Lower Friargate, York YO1 9SL
tel 0330 229 0820
email info@nayt.org.uk
website www.nayt.org.uk

Founded in 1982, the National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT) is an educational charity for youth theatre practice in England. The organisation supports the development of youth theatre activity

through training, advocacy, participation programmes, and information services. Registration is open to any group or individual using theatre techniques in their work with young people, outside formal education.

NYAT responds to enquiries from young people, teachers, parents, carers, youth workers and social services looking for information and advice about youth theatre provision or career or educational opportunities. This free service puts young people in direct contact with youth theatres.

National Youth Arts Wales (NYAW)

Office 202, 2nd Floor, Trafalgar House,
5 Fitzalan Place, Cardiff CF24 0ED
tel 029-2063 6466
email nyaw@nyaw.org.uk
website www.nyaw.co.uk
Facebook /nationalyouthartsnwales
X/Twitter @nyaw_ccic

Formed in 2017 to represent the National Youth Brass Band of Wales, National Youth Wind Orchestra of Wales, National Youth Choir of Wales, National Youth Dance Wales, National Youth Orchestra of Wales, and National Youth Theatre of Wales (NYTW).

The National Youth Theatre of Wales was founded in 1976 and has since provided opportunities for hundreds of young people, many of whom are now actively involved with the theatre as professional actors, directors, writers, designers and stage managers. The NYTW is aimed at young people aged 16–22 (either born in, or living in Wales) who are drawn from all over the country. With guidance from its Creative Activist, the youth theatre prepares and rehearses during the summer of each year for a series of high-profile public performances. Membership awarded following a successful audition process and bursaries are available.

In addition, the NYTW spearheads a development programme of workshops and education activities, designed to increase interest and participation in youth theatre.

National Youth Music Theatre (NYMT)

South Cottage, Keers Green, Dunmow,
Essex CM6 1PQ
email enquiries@nymt.org.uk
website www.nymt.org.uk

The National Youth Music Theatre offers exceptional opportunities in pre-professional, musical theatre training for talented young people of all backgrounds aged 10–23 years through skill workshops, master classes and residential courses led by industry professionals, through commissioning and presentation of exciting new work, and – in collaboration with some of the UK's leading creative minds – producing bold, new realisations of major works of the core repertoire.

These opportunities exist for stage performers, musicians, technicians, musical directors, choreographers and designers.

The National Youth Music Theatre represents the very best in work with young people through musical theatre, enabling thousands of youngsters across the UK to develop both their creative and personal potential, leading Andrew Lloyd-Webber to dub it “the best youth music theatre in the world”.

National Youth Theatre of Great Britain (NYT)

443–45 Holloway Road, London N7 6LW
tel 020-3696 7066
email info@nyt.org.uk
website www.nyt.org.uk
X/Twitter @NYTofGB
Instagram @nationalyouththeatre

Founded in 1956 as the world's first youth theatre, the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain is a world-leading youth arts organisation. Delivering free performance opportunities, courses and masterclasses, with a range of funded places, bursaries and fee-waivers, it nurtures and showcases exceptional performers and theatre technicians from Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Every year the NYT visits over 70 arts venues and schools across the UK in the search for young people aged between 14–25 to join their company. The NYT also offers a range of digital activities for young people to take part in from home. Once successfully auditioned, members can be involved with ambitious productions both on stage and backstage, as well as developing skills in facilitation and creative leadership. The NYT also runs a social inclusion programme featuring long-term engagement with non-mainstream schools, and accredited courses for those not in education or training, as well as many open access projects and community productions.

The NYT's world renowned alumni include: Helen Mirren, Daniel Craig, Colin Firth, Rosamund Pike, Daniel Day Lewis, Zawe Ashton, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Orlando Bloom, Catherine Tate, Ben Kingsley, Ashley Jensen, Derek Jacobi, Timothy Dalton, David Walliams, Matt Lucas, Hugh Bonneville, Matt Smith, Adeel Akter and David Harewood. Backstage NYT graduates have gone on to work in key roles at the world's biggest theatres and events including Olympic ceremonies, award-winning large-scale theatre productions and global tours of the world's biggest music artists. Cultural leaders who started their careers with NYT include Lynette Linton (Artistic Director, Bush Theatre), Bryony Shannahan (Artistic Director, Royal Exchange Theatre), Gbolahan Obisesan (former Artistic Director, Brixton House, Michelle Terry (Artistic Director, Shakespeare's Globe), Matthew Warchus (Artistic Director, Old Vic Theatre) and many more.

Scottish Youth Theatre

email enquiries@scottishyouththeatre.org
website www.scottishyouththeatre.org
Facebook /scottishyouththeatre

4 Training

X/Twitter @ScottishYT

Instagram @scottish_youth_theatre

Scottish Youth Theatre is a national young artists' development organisation for early-career artists aged 14–25 years who are based in Scotland. The company creates opportunities that inspire and shape young people, based on their needs and aspirations as creatives and their diverse and unique perspectives. The company's purpose is to collaborate with young theatre artists to create experiences and events that reverberate in their lives, their communities and their country.

The company runs on a project-to-project basis, providing both space and stimulus to explore theatre. With Scottish Youth Theatre, young artists can develop and refine their practice through approaching new art forms and learning new skills, exploring new perspectives, making and touring new work, learning about the professional industry and connecting with like-minded individuals and professional artists. The company cultivates an environment where participants are at the helm of their own creative journey and the work they make is their opportunity to interrogate, question and reflect on things that matter to them.

Scottish Youth Theatre is a non-membership-based organisation.

Youth Theatre Ireland

7 North Great George's Street, Dublin 1,
Republic of Ireland

tel +353 (0)1 878 1301

email info@youththeatre.ie

website www.youththeatre.ie

Facebook /YouthTheatreIreland

X/Twitter @YouthTheatreIrl

Instagram @youththeatreireland

Youth Theatre Ireland is the national development organisation for youth theatre. It supports a network of youth theatres which deliver year-round programmes of drama workshops and performance opportunities to young people aged 12–21 from cities, towns and villages across Ireland.

Youth Theatre Ireland advocates the inherent value and the unique relationship between young people and theatre as an artform, and is committed to extending and enhancing young people's understanding of theatre and to raising the artistic standards of youth theatre across the country. The organisation supports youth drama in practice through an annual programme that includes the National Youth Theatre, National festivals of youth theatres, commissioning new writing, publications, resources, training and other services, as well as research and policy development.

With a membership of 55 youth theatres throughout the country, Youth Theatre Ireland supports the sustained development of youth theatres in partnership with local authorities, youth services, theatres and arts centres. Its productions are of a professional standard and are cast from youth theatres around Ireland.

Arts Emergency

Julie Hesmondhalgh

The crisis in arts education: how working-class artists are being squeezed out of the industry

I had an unexpectedly lovely train journey pre-pandemic. Lucky enough to have managed to reserve a seat at a table in a typically over-crowded carriage, I was planning to shove my earphones in, bury my head in a book and disengage from my fellow passengers. So, when the strangers at my table started to chat to one another – and to me – my heart sank a bit. But it ended up being one of the most interesting and engaging journeys I've ever had.

My cross-country companions were Alan, a middle-aged gay actor; Kate, a young maths teacher at a struggling comprehensive school in West London; and Henry, a Ghanaian-born scientist working in Washington DC. We covered so much

in that two hours between London and Manchester: childhood, sexuality, racism, Trump and perhaps inevitably – there being a teacher amongst us – education. Kate talked with sadness about how the new GCSEs were taking their toll on teachers and pupils alike at her school and how she'd been working every evening and weekend to try to get her Year 11s through them. She said that the school was already feeling the effects of the cuts in arts subjects; that although she was a maths teacher, the erosion of subjects that had enhanced her students' creativity and awakened their minds to the wider world was already taking its toll on the mental health of the young people. Henry talked passionately about how, although he was a scientist by trade, it was the arts that gave him joy, that refreshed him and rebooted him after long days at the lab. Music venues, theatres, cinemas: these were his hang-outs of choice. Alan and I both talked about the opportunities that we had taken for granted as we started out in the performing arts – opportunities that no longer exist for young people growing up in towns like ours; from families like ours.

I, along with a dozen of my mates, left my hometown of Accrington at the age of 18 to go to drama school in London, after a brilliant theatre studies teacher at our local Further Education college inspired us all to make a go of it and audition. There were five of us from that course at LAMDA at the same time at the end of the 1980s, all on *full grants* from our Local Education Authority. That FE performing arts course, I found out this week, no longer exists. Neither does the full local authority grant, of course. And nor, I'd venture, does the philosophy that an education in the arts, or a desire to have a career in the arts, is a worthwhile pursuit for people from backgrounds like mine.

There has been an insidious mindset creeping into our national psyche, no doubt massively exacerbated by the prohibitive costs of higher education tuition fees, that somehow a career in the arts is pie-in-the-sky and unrealistic, and that an arts or humanities degree or drama/art school training is not worth the investment. God forbid that anyone should be enthusiastic about learning for learning's sake and want to study philosophy or classics, never mind acting or dance because of a personal passion for the subject, without wondering and worrying about how to make that choice economically viable in the long term. As Nicky Morgan, the then Conservative Education Minister famously said in 2014,

Arts Emergency

Unit W3, 8 Woodberry Down, London N4 2TG
 email info@arts-emergency.org
 website www.arts-emergency.org

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'Arts subjects limit career choices', warning young people that studying arts at higher education could 'hold them back for the rest of their lives'.

The majority of educationalists, of course – even those working in science and maths subjects like my travelling companion Kate – would disagree. The study of the arts, and in particular the performing arts, are partly encouraged in top public schools, I'm sure, because of the confidence, social skills and interpretative thinking that develop as a result. The wealthy have never been discouraged from indulging their passion for music, film, painting, theatre and dance. A government report in November 2017 recorded that the creative industries were indeed thriving with the '£92bn sector growing at twice the rate of the economy' (www.gov.uk *Creative industries' record contribution to UK economy*, 29 November 2017).

But it appears that a huge swathe of the population, namely the state educated, the less well-off, the working class, for whom the decision to saddle oneself with over £27,000 debt at the start of their adult life is a major consideration, are being massively disincentivized to engage with the arts and humanities, from school onwards. It starts with funding cuts and continues as arts subjects are moved into a more theoretical and less practical curriculum framework at GCSE level. The controversial English Baccalaureate and its exclusion of arts is seen by many as the nail in the coffin of any meaningful creative education. Drama, art, dance and music at school have often been the only access young people have had to learning those skills.

There are, luckily, amazing organisations picking up the pieces and attempting to fill the gaps that current government policy is leaving. There is hope. Groups of people are crowdfunding to create bursaries to allow students from less privileged backgrounds to access arts and performance degrees. Theatres and art spaces are investing in outreach work to pull hard-to-reach communities into their buildings through youth theatre and specialised groups. Teachers and directors are setting up free training programmes, and watching their talented students overcome sometimes unbelievably challenging personal circumstances to thrive and succeed in an arts industry that they have been told is not for them: organisations like Alt, Nottingham-based Talent First and the mighty Arts Emergency.

Set up in 2011 by comedian Josie Long and campaigner Neil Griffiths, the Arts Emergency philosophy and aim are simple and effective: to create an 'Alternative Old Boys' Network'; to open up the same opportunities naturally afforded to those privileged few, who grow up with those school and family connections firmly in place, to everyone. They have pulled together an enormous number of experts and practitioners from a vast array of specialised areas and connected them with young people from backgrounds that have meant they have little access to the arts. Free talks and events are regularly made available, and when the scheme spread to the North a couple of years ago I became involved as a supporter and speaker in schools and colleges.

There is an incredibly successful mentoring scheme that I have witnessed first-hand as my husband, the writer Ian Kershaw, has been a mentor for over a year now. His first mentee, a sparky seventeen-year-old aspiring writer and the first in her family to access higher education, won't mind me saying that she thrived under the programme. Together, they saw theatre, attended talks by leading writers, met people in the industry and visited studios and rehearsal rooms. She grabbed the opportunity she was offered to write for a

local theatre-in-education tour and did work experience at CBBC. She is now at university studying English with a creative writing pathway as part of her BA.

Maisie (not her real name) was clear about what she wanted to do from the off and Arts Emergency enabled her, creating networks that simply don't ordinarily exist for people like her. But sometimes the work they do is about opening up unknown worlds to their participants. Another young person might, for example, be passionate about, and fascinated by, films and filmmaking, but have no access to the world of the studio floor or editing suite or post-production house. He or she might be a fantastic and naturally gifted vision mixer or a sound recordist, but unless they're given the opportunity to experiment in these roles, they'll never know. As Arts Emergency say: 'You can't be what you can't see.'

The working-class artists who were encouraged and supported by the state from the 1950s through to my generation growing up in the 1980s and early 1990s, who are now part of the cultural landscape of the UK as writers, actors, directors, dancers, visual artists, musicians, directors, etc. are the last of their kind. Or could be, if we don't act to change the current climate of exclusion. A culture without diversity is a sick one. If our future artists only come from a narrow stratum of society (the most well-off and privately educated) then who will be left to tell the stories of the rest of us? Who will hold a mirror to our world and ask the important questions about how we live now? Because art exists not only to entertain, but to reflect and inform and inspire. At its best, it can be transcendent and transformative and completely democratic; in that it is, or should be, available to us all, regardless of where we're from and who we are. The more diverse our culture, the wider the world of the stories we experience, the richer we all are for it. Perhaps most importantly, it creates, as I experienced on that Pendolino train a few weeks back, a point of connection in an increasingly isolating and fractured world.

Julie Hesmondhalgh was born and grew up in Accrington, Lancashire. She trained at LAMDA and set up Arts Threshold Theatre in the early 90s. She co-runs Take Back Theatre Collective in Manchester. Her *Working Diary* was published in 2019. She is best known for playing Hayley in Coronation Street from 1998–2014. She has worked extensively in theatre, TV and radio.

Levelling the playing field: actors from working- and benefit-class backgrounds

David Mumeni, actor and founder of Open Door
Interview by Rob Ostlere

David Mumeni is a performer, writer and acting teacher, and the artistic director and founder of Open Door, a charity supporting young people who want to apply for drama school but face financial barriers. Open Door offers an eight-month part-time intensive course, with successful acting and production arts applicants receiving free auditions and financial support for interviews, as well as mentoring and a range of other help. David trained as an actor at Drama Centre and has gone on to work extensively at the highest levels of the industry. Here he talks about the need for organisations like Open Door, makes the case for drama school training and shares advice for students and those in the first few years of their careers.

What were you seeing in the industry that led you to create Open Door?

It was about addressing inequality by making sure that everyone who wanted to go to drama school got their fair go. Part of that was making the audition process affordable for young people from working- and benefit-class backgrounds, and also finding talent from places outside London.

As well as finding these young people, mentoring them and supporting them financially with applications, you've also been working directly with the schools to make changes

Yes, for example getting a wider intake of people by pushing the drama schools to do more auditions across the country. Or pushing to change the audition panels, making sure they're diverse in all the different ways, be it class or race or gender. We also looked at the way the panels sometimes behaved. It's not about having to be super, super nice but if you don't create a space that allows someone to be comfortable they're just not going to do their best work. I've also been talking to the schools which don't redirect actors in the first round. What we've seen with some of our young people we mentor – who maybe haven't had access to youth theatres or good drama departments at school – is that they can transform and be amazing simply by asking them the right questions: "What's this speech about for you? How do you relate to it? What do you want? Who are you speaking to?" You're expecting all these young people to all come in at the same level and they're not. You have to give redirection in the first round.

And the drama schools have taken all this on?

Not as urgently as we'd like. There's a lot of work that still needs to be done but some have been really responsive. The auditions have changed. The schools are looking at the curriculums and the classes they teach. I think Sarah (Frankcom) taking over LAMDA is really exciting. She has the artistic side but also used to work in a school and helped set up a lot

of the youth provisions in Manchester. It's good that someone understands where young people are coming from, especially those from outside London.

You've previously made the case brilliantly for drama schools

Well, you do learn there! Acting is a skill, and you get the chance to practice doing that every day. Whereas if you go straight into the industry, you're not necessarily going to do that much acting, especially to start with. Even if you did a couple of plays and a week on a TV series that's only sixteen or seventeen weeks' acting. And that's in a good year!

And you've done a lot of myth-busting. One idea that comes up is that the schools are too expensive, but you've managed to get all these great students in from lower income backgrounds

With the schools we work with there is no such thing as too expensive because the big ones all have student finance. Affordability is only a problem with schools that don't have that; although the privately-run drama schools do offer bursaries and DaDAs (Dance and Drama Awards), it can still be a struggle. With the loans – it is a debt, of course it is – but you're only going to pay that back if you earn enough. Also, with most of these big schools there's massive bursary funding to assist with living costs. And we've highlighted the issue at schools where they might need more.

And students get a lot for their money, relatively

People are paying nine grand a year to go to an amazing university but they're doing three or four hours a week contact-time in a lecture hall full of people. Drama school, you get triple that in a day with some of the best teachers in the country in a room of sixteen to twenty people. And then you get a showcase at the end!

With Open Door you've given advice to students about changes in the industry, especially casting and how that impacts choosing material for their showcases

With showcases, I say to the students worrying about type-casting that agents are going to assume you can do different stuff and are going to try to put you up for as much as possible. So just show you, rather than worrying about, "What do I need to present to be signed?" Present good acting. Rather than trying to fit yourself into some archetype, pick pieces that might be challenging when you're working on them but that when you perform you can do them with some ease. That sort of thinking applies throughout your third year. Your main focus has to be on acting to the best of your ability, being a nice person when you chat to people, and hopefully things will happen for you.

What about auditioning advice?

It's the same thing we tell the Open Door young people when they audition; you've got no control over what this panel thinks. One panel might like you, one panel might not. Your job is to go, "This character is connecting with this character, I'm playing this objective. I'll do my interview, show you what I'm actually like and then leave. If you don't like it, you don't like it". There's power in that. That's some of the work we do at Open Door. It takes eight months to get a young actor to a place of confidence where they realise they have no control over what people think. All you can say is, "I did the best job I could do in the circumstances that were given and in the time I had".

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Talking about the industry more widely now, how do people balance having an awareness of inequalities without letting that preoccupy them and hold them back?

It's really hard to quantify why you are where you are in your career. If I think about my mixed-race background, perhaps it's got me this far because I'm a little bit different to other people but it might have limited me in all these other ways. The point is it's really hard to be sure of whether something doesn't happen for you because of your class, your race or your accent or whatever. Of course, that's not to deny that those barriers aren't there. But if you go around thinking everything you don't get is because of that, I don't think that's a healthy way to look at it. Wherever you can, separate the two: "Have I not got this because the industry is tough?" or "Have I not got it because of a barrier?" Sometimes it might be very clear, and I've felt that. But I've come up against these barriers and I've done OK so my thought is let me try and help others with solutions.

And actors can take positive steps themselves to address inequalities?

When I started Open Door people said to me, "You're creating these actors but there's no work for them". I feel like it's a little bit different now and I don't have that fear. Of course, there are still a lot of the same types of writers working but people are breaking through and people do want to hear original stories and original voices. But if that work isn't being made for you, you can create it. And that doesn't mean you have to write it. I've known lots of people who wanted to change agents for example, and put on a show to do that. They've not been able to write something but they've said I'm going to get my friend to write it, and I'm going to get my director-friend to direct it, and another actor in to play this part and develop it. And sometimes that play goes on further: to Edinburgh, another theatre, into TV development.

It's important to balance focusing on the problem and the solutions?

We have to find ways of using the passion and the anger, putting it into some sort of positive action that is effective. We need tangible solutions, schemes and work: be it writers' programmes, or things like Sabrina Mahfouz creating a scheme for ethnic minority theatre critics, or something like Open Door. Next, we need to start supporting new voices in producing; to see more diversity among the people in charge.

To find out more about Open Door and to apply, go to www.opendoor.org.uk. You can support the charity's work by following them on social media @opendoorpeople and donating at www.opendoor.org.uk/donate

Rob Ostlere is the author of *The Actor's Career Bible*, published by Bloomsbury, a practical guide to building an acting career based on in-depth interviews with over seventy-five industry experts. He trained at National Youth Theatre and RADA and has since worked widely across television, theatre and film. *The Actor's Career Bible* is available at www.bloomsbury.com. You can also find out more @actorscareer bible on Instagram, at www.actorscareer bible.com and on the book's YouTube channel. Rob can be found via @robostlere on social media, where there is more information about his latest acting and writing work.

Drama schools

Currently there is a core of established drama schools which belong to an organisation called the Federation of Drama Schools (www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk) which was formed after the closure of Drama UK in 2016. The eighteen drama schools which are members of the Federation all run courses that were formerly accredited by Drama UK, offering practice-based, vocational training courses, quality assured by experienced professionals. Upon graduating from any of these schools you will be eligible for Spotlight and Equity membership. There are also, of course, well-respected courses that are not part of the Federation of Drama Schools.

It is important to check the current funding arrangements for each course you intend applying for. Don't simply rely on what arrangements were in place last year, as things have a habit of changing. Almost all of the drama schools offer a three-year BA degree in acting – in spite of the fact that there is little or no written component to the courses, let alone formal, written exams. Historically, the schools took the 'degree' route to help students get funding on the same basis as those following conventional academic courses. Degree status actually means very little in the acting profession, and courses with degree status are not necessarily better than those without it. Funding for some accredited one- and two-year courses is available, but not with the same frequency as for three-year courses.

It is worth spending time checking through all the courses listed below – also, read through the *Guide to Professional Training in Drama and Technical Theatre*, which although slightly out of date is very helpful. Look at the online prospectuses for any school that you feel could be viable for you – and read each one thoroughly. Important considerations include whether you could be eligible for funding whether student loan, scholarship or DaDA award for your fees and maintenance. Central London is significantly more expensive to live in than out of London schools.

Above all, it's important to try to assess which schools and courses you feel would suit you best and to apply, via UCAS www.ucas.ac.uk, to as many as you can afford the audition fees and travel costs for. Some schools offer means-tested audition fee waivers. Don't forget to factor in the cost of overnight accommodation, if necessary. The plain truth is that competition for places is so intense, that you need to audition for as many places as feasible. Every time you do another audition you will learn more about the techniques of auditioning than any book or class can teach you. It is important to appreciate that many people take two or three years of auditioning, and sometimes more, before they get places. If you are determined to become a professional actor, you have to take rejection in your stride – learn from it, and keep on trying until you succeed.

Finally, carefully check the application deadlines, funding details and audition specifications of each school to which you intend to apply – there are some considerable variations. See the Checklist following the listings given below. Many schools will have audition guidelines and advice for applicants on their website.

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Notes:

- For general information on funding for fees and maintenance loans, see www.gov.uk/browse/education/student-finance.
- Places on some courses are currently funded through Dance and Drama Awards (DaDAs). These were introduced in the late 1990s, and provide funding for about two-thirds of successful applicants. For more details, check each relevant school's prospectus and website – also look at www.gov.uk/dance-drama-awards.
- For the latest details on member of the Federation of Drama Schools please see FDS website www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk.

*Member of the Federation of Drama Schools

ArtsEd*

14 Bath Road, London W4 1LY

tel 020-8987 6666

email info@artsed.co.uk

website <https://artsed.co.uk>

Principal Dr Julie Spencer, Deputy Principal Yewande Akindele

ArtsEd is one of the UK's leading drama schools, offering outstanding conservatoire training on the BA (Hons) courses in Acting and Musical Theatre. In 2019, they were awarded TEF Gold, the highest rating from the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework and were recently placed sixth in *The Telegraph's* list of British universities with the best graduate prospects. ArtsEd was ranked as the top school for overall student satisfaction in the 2021 National Student Survey.

Degree courses are validated by City, University of London. Dance and Drama Awards are available, linked to the Level 6 approved Trinity College London diplomas and ArtsEd also awards bursaries from its own funds. Applications for courses and awards should be made direct to the school.

Acting courses:

- BA (Hons) Acting/Level 6 Diploma in Professional Acting (3 years). Applicants must be aged 18 or over.
- BA (Hons) Musical Theatre/Level 6 Diploma in Musical Theatre (3 years). Applicants must be aged 18 or over.
- MA Acting (1 year postgraduate). Applicants must be aged 21 or over.
- Foundation Musical Theatre – Cert HE (1 year). Applicants must be aged 18 or over.
- Foundation Acting – Cert HE (1 year). Applicants must be aged 18 or over.
- Part-time Foundation Musical Theatre (2 terms). Applicants must be aged 18 or over.
- Part-time Foundation Acting (2 terms). Applicants must be over 18 or over.

The Birmingham Theatre School

The Old Fire Station, 285–287 Moseley Road,

Highgate, Birmingham B12 0DX

tel 0121 440 1665

email info@birminghamtheatreschool.co.uk

website www.birminghamtheatreschool.com

Principal Chris Rozanski

Full-time acting courses:

- BTEC Extended National Diploma in Performing Arts (Acting) (2 years). Applicants must be aged 16 or over.
- Professional Acting Diploma (1 year). Applicants must be aged 18 or over.
- Part-Time Evening Acting Diploma. Termly.
- Acting for Beginners. Autumn, spring and summer terms, 11 weeks per term.

The Bridge Theatre Training Company

Admin: The Bridge at Cecil Sharp House,

2 Regent's Park Road, London NW1 7AY,

Courses: Held in the Camden area

tel 020-7424 0860

email admin@thebridge-ttc.org

website www.thebridge-ttc.org

Joint Artistic Directors Mark Akrell, Judith Pollard

The Bridge is a non-profit organisation which provides intensive training for a professional acting career. Courses include comprehensive career guidance, and a graduating season of public productions in London theatres, with a West End showcase in front of agents, directors and casting directors.

Bridge students receive training in acting, singing, dance, improv, Shakespeare, combat and much more. Bridge students also study screen acting and will record a video showreel.

Full-time acting courses:

- Professional Acting Course (2 years). Applicants must be aged 18 or over.
- Professional Acting Course (1 year postgraduate/post-experience). Applicants must be aged 21 or over, with a university degree or relevant experience.
- 3-day and 5-day options are now available for both the 1-year and 2-year courses.

Bristol Improv Theatre

50 St Paul's Road, Bristol BS8 1LP

mobile 07936 617158

email hello@improvtheatre.co.uk
 website <https://improvtheatre.co.uk>
 Facebook /BITheatre
 Instagram @bristolimprovtheatre

The UK's first full-time dedicated improv theatre. They create, teach and perform spontaneous theatre that is ambitious and unapologetic. Work and training is based in long-form, narrative theatre, using an approach that has been built from training with improv practitioners from all over the world, and years of teaching and performing professionally.

They offer flexible pathways for learning improv at any level of experience or ability. This ranges from drop-in style classes to longer weekly courses and intensive weekend workshops. Also regularly host UK and internationally renowned improv instructors, who deliver workshops and courses at their theatre in Bristol.

There is currently no wheelchair access.

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School*

1–3 Downside Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 2XF
 tel 0117 973 3535

email enquiries@oldvic.ac.uk

website www.oldvic.ac.uk

Facebook /BOVTS

X/Twitter @BOVTS

Instagram @bovtsbristol

Principal Fiona Francombe, *Director of Drama* Ali de Souza

All courses are entirely vocational and are validated by the University of the West of England.

Applications for all courses are made directly to the School via the website. All applicants are auditioned – please see our website for details of the relevant selection process.

- BA Hons Professional Acting (3 years).
- MA Screen Acting (1 year, 38 weeks).
- MFA in Professional Acting (1 year, 40 weeks, for international students).
- Summer Foundation Course in Acting (10 weeks).

For details of the range of short courses and masterclasses available, please see the School website.

City Lit

1–10 Keeley Street, Covent Garden,
 London WC2B 4BA
 tel 020-4582 0413

email drama@citylit.ac.uk

website www.citylit.ac.uk/courses/acting-diploma-level-3

The Acting Diploma (Level 3) is an intensive year-long course that provides students with a thorough foundation in actor training.

Working with industry professionals and experienced teachers, candidates will develop skills in actor's voice, movement and physicality. Students will hone

their craft across a range of specialisms, from classical training through to screen performance. Students will perform in a full-scale theatre production at the end of the course.

The course timetable is designed to fit around part-time employment.

Applicants for the course will ideally have completed a full Level 2 Foundation in Drama course or equivalent (at least one years' actor training).

Entry is by audition. Please prepare two 2-minute monologues (one classical, one contemporary) and be prepared to attend a 3-hour workshop. No audition fee. Auditions from April for September course start.

Students can apply for an Advanced Learner Loan from Student Finance England for up to £2,225 of the fees for this course. For more information contact the Drama department at drama@citylit.ac.uk.

Court Theatre Training Company

The Courtyard Theatre, Bowling Green Walk,
 40 Pitfield Street, London N1 6EU
 tel 020-7739 6868

email info@courttheatre.org.uk

website www.courttheatre.org.uk

Instagram @courttheatretainingcompany

Principal/Director Tim Gill

The Court Theatre Training Company site has wheelchair access and provides support for students with learning support needs.

Full-time acting courses:

- BA (Hons) Acting (2 years) – Taught on a 2-year accelerated program, this distinctive course is specially designed for the practical training of actors resident within the professional environment of a working theatre and is taught by working practitioners in the field. The course fee is £10,800 per academic year. Applicants must be aged 18+ and hold 80 UCAS entry points on entry. Mature students up to any age may be accepted with no UCAS point requirement if they show potential at audition/interview. Public funding is available via the Student Finance Company. Applications should be made directly via the website or via UCAS throughout the year.

The Dorset School of Acting

Lighthouse, 21 Kingland Road, Poole,
 Dorset BH15 1UG

tel (01202) 922675

email admin@dorsetschoolofacting.co.uk

website www.dorsetschoolofacting.co.uk

Co-founders & Principals James Bowden, Laura Roxburgh

The 1 year diploma course in Acting & Musical Theatre has a 100% success rate in placing students at reputable drama schools for further training or into

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professional work. It is designed to provide a real insight into the rigours of drama school training, giving classes in acting, dance, voice and singing, tutorial sessions, theatre visits and business advice. It does not expect applicants to be strong in all disciplines when they audition.

Acting courses offered:

- 1 Year Diploma in Acting & Musical Theatre (30 weeks) – the qualification gained is Trinity ATCL Level 4 in Drama & Speech. Applicants should be aged 16+. Applications should be made directly to the school by the middle of August.
- Fully funded 2-year vocational sixth form for students aged 16–19 (level 3) in Acting (60 weeks) – the qualification is an extended diploma equivalent to 3 A levels. The course is designed to give students a strong foundation in the fundamentals of the performing arts industry with an acting bias. Applications should be made directly to the school by the middle of August.

Drama Studio London (DSL)*

1 Grange Road, London W5 5QN
tel 020-8579 3897
email admin@dramastudiolondon.co.uk
website www.dramastudiolondon.co.uk
Facebook /dramastudiolondon
X/Twitter @Drama_Studio
Instagram @dramastudiolondon
Director of DSL Emma Lucia Hands

Drama Studio London (DSL) provides full time, professional acting training, for the profession by the profession, for adults with passion and talent. For more information and to apply, visit the website or contact admissions@dramastudiolondon.co.uk. Diploma students have the option of taking the Trinity College London National Certificate in Professional Acting, along with their DSL Diploma.

- 1 Year PGDip/MA in Professional Acting validated by University of West London (UWL)
- 2 Year MFA in Professional Acting with Independent Production, validated by UWL
- 3 Year BA (Hons) in Professional Acting, validated by UWL
- Short part-time evening courses and summer school

East 15 Acting School*

Loughton Campus: Hatfields, Rectory Lane,
Loughton IG10 3RY
tel 020-8508 5983
email east15@essex.ac.uk
Southend campus: Elmer Approach, Southend-on Sea
SS1 1LW
tel (01702) 328200
website www.east15.ac.uk
Facebook /east15actingschool
Instagram @east15actingschool

Full-time acting courses: All BA courses are full-time, 3 years. Deadline for applications end of May, but ideally end of April.

- BA Acting
- BA Acting (International)
- BA Acting and Community Theatre
- BA Acting and Contemporary Theatre
- BA Acting and Stage Combat
- BA Acting and Physical Theatre
- BA World Performance

All acting courses require a successful audition. For additional academic requirements see course details on the website.

Other full-time undergraduate courses:

- Certificate of Higher Education in Theatre Arts (1 year)
- BA Stage and Production Management (3 years)
- BA Creative Production (3 years)

Post-graduate courses:

- MA Acting (1 year). Selection for this course is based upon experience and potential. All applicants must be over the age of 21; there is no upper age limit. Applicants must hold a BA degree (normally at least a 2:1) or have suitable previous life, professional or academic experience.
- MA/MFA in Acting (International)
- MA/MFA Theatre Directing (1 year)
- MA Advanced Professional Theatre Practice (1 year)
- PhD Research Degrees

Please see the website for details of the above courses.

École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq

116 Rue de la Carreterie, 84000 Avignon, France
tel +33 (0)4 88 61 93 13
email contact@ecole-jacqueslecoq.com
website www.ecole-jacqueslecoq.com
Facebook /ecole.jacqueslecoq
Instagram @ecolejacqueslecoq
Principal Mrs Anne Astolfé

Founded in Paris in 1956, with the aim of producing a young theatre of new work, generating performance languages which emphasise the physical playing of the actor. Focuses on art theatre, but with the view that theatre education is broader than the theatre itself: "It is a matter not only of training actors, but of educating theatre artists of all kinds." Provides as broad and durable a foundation as possible for every student. Also offers part-time courses. See also the company's entry under *Short-term and part-time courses* on page 42.

Full-time acting courses:

- Professional Course (Certificate; 2 years). Public funding: AFDAS, OCPO, France Travail (only for people living and working in France). Applications should be made direct to the school from November to June (generally after June there is a waiting list). Applicants must be aged 21+ with initial theatre training and stage experience.

Federation of Drama Schools



Liverpool Institute For Performing Arts,
Mount Street, Liverpool L1 9HF
email info@federationofdramaschools.co.uk
website www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk
Instagram @federationofdramaschools

The Federation of Drama Schools (FDS) brings together established UK drama school training providers as a group to develop discussion, resources and projects which support and promote accessible, high-quality professional performers training, and to communicate to prospective students the range of training options available within the drama school contexts. FDS aims to provide current and relevant information to prospective performers, staff, parents and the industry, to ensure a pipeline of talent continues to emerge from drama schools to shape and inform the contemporary performance industries.

Fourth Monkey

97–101 Seven Sisters Rd, Finsbury Park,
London N7 7QP
tel 020-7281 0360
email office@fourthmonkey.co.uk
The Bamboo House, 9 Portland Square, Bristol BS2 8ST
tel 0117 942 2723
email bamboohouse@fourthmonkey.co.uk
website www.fourthmonkey.co.uk
Facebook /FourthMonkeyTC
X/Twitter @FourthMonkeyTC
Instagram @fourthmonkey
Artistic Director Steven Green, *Director of Training* Charleen Qwaye

Established in 2012 to provide innovative and inclusive industry responsive training courses. Works to develop and empower the next generation of professional actors and creative theatre makers and challenge the status quo of traditional conservatoire training.

Accredited training courses:

- BA (Hons) Acting (2 year accelerated degree)
- BA (Hons) Acting (3 year, full-time)
- CertHE Acting & Theatre Making (1 year foundational course)
- MA Collaborative Theatre (1 year full-time or 2 year part-time course)

Fourth Monkey has Centres of Excellence in London and Bristol which host the Young Actors Company and offer extensive professional development opportunities and short courses. Fourth Monkey is also a critically acclaimed Ensemble Theatre Company renowned for its visually stunning and compassionate storytelling.

The Giles Foreman Centre for Acting

Studio Soho,
2A Royalty Mews (entrance between Quo Vadis/
Barrafina & Japes), Dean Street, London W1D 3AR
tel 020-7437 3175
email info@gilesforeman.com
website www.gilesforeman.com
Facebook /gilesforeman.centre
Instagram @gilesforeman
Director Giles Foreman, *Deputy Director* Lindsay Richardson

An exciting professional acting studio - a range of experienced professional coaches in screen- and theatre-acting, movement, voice, improvisation, on-camera, Meisner technique, movement psychology and character analysis, directing and text analysis. Also, visiting specialist-coaches from USA and across Europe.

The centre comprises of 2 easy-access, large, bright, air-conditioned studios plus changing room, chillout area and kitchen, and props store. (Wheelchair-accessible, entrance lift and step-free studio facilities.) Plus separate daylight-studio and meeting-rooms. Wi-Fi throughout. Offers the opportunity for Alumni/graduates and professional actors to further develop their skills through acting classes and workshops in both film and theatre. Specialised intensive short courses offered by internationally renowned practitioners from all over the world. Due to its location at the heart of the UK film, TV and theatre industry, GFCA also offers opportunities to meet casting directors, directors, producers through industry events.

Professional coaches are available to prepare actors for auditions and self-tapes, and develop characters for projects.

ASIC-accredited institution; registered centre for Trinity College London. Online application form for all long courses: <https://forms.gle/tF9hLNvztXuFfHYL7>.

Full-time courses: All ages 18+. taught in small groups, for maximum focus.

- Advanced Intensive Diplomas (Actor and Actor/Director modes – 20-month/5-term). One subsidised scholarship available. Applicants should be aged 19 or over
- Summation-term, for graduates from our Advanced diploma courses in Paris and London (3-month)

GSA, Guildford School of Acting*

University of Surrey, Stag Hill Campus,
Guildford GU2 7XH
tel (01483) 684040
email gsaenquiries@gsa.surrey.ac.uk
website <https://gsauk.org>
Facebook /gsauk
X/Twitter @the_gsa
Instagram @guildfordschoolofacting
Head of School Dr Catherine McNamara

16 Training

Guildford School of Acting was founded in 1935 and is part of the University of Surrey. GSA is a vibrant community of performers, performance makers, creative practitioners and technicians graduating from a wide variety of programmes each year. From 1964 onwards has concentrated on the vocational training of actors and stage managers.

Full-time courses: Applications for undergraduate courses should be made via UCAS (applicants must be aged 18 or over, with 3 A levels). Applications for the BA (Hons) Theatre (conversion by distance learning) and for Foundation and Postgraduate courses (applicants must be aged 21 or over) should be made direct to the University of Surrey.

- Foundation (CertHe) Acting (1 year).
- Foundation (CertHe) Musical Theatre (1 year).
- BA (Hons) Acting (3 years).
- BA (Hons) Actor-Musician (3 years).
- BA (Hons) Applied and Contemporary Theatre (3 years).
- BA (Hons) Musical Theatre (3 years).
- BA (Hons) Theatre Production (3 years).
- BA (Hons) Theatre (1 year online learning conversion programme).
- MA Acting (1 year).
- MA Movement Direction (1 year).
- MA Musical Theatre (1 year).
- MA Stage and Production Management (1 year).
- MA Theatre (Part time online learning) (2 years).
- MFA Acting (2 years).
- MFA Movement Direction (2 years).
- MFA Musical Theatre (2 years).
- MFA Theatre (Part time online learning) (2 years).
- PhD Theatre.

Guildhall School of Music & Drama*

Silk Street, Barbican, London EC2Y 8DT

tel 020-7628 2571

email acting_applications@gsm.d.ac.uk

website www.gsm.d.ac.uk/drama

X/Twitter @guildhallschool

Vice Principal & Director of Drama Orla O'Loughlin

Full-time acting courses:

- BA (Hons) Acting (3 years). Innovative in structure and approach, our Acting programme is committed to the development of each student's unique and individual practice. We aim to develop actors who are tenacious and versatile, able to move with confidence between stage, screen, digital and audio platforms and classical, contemporary and experimental repertoire. Our programme is based in the heart of the City of London, with a generous staff-student ratio and a high number of teaching hours. When you begin your training with us, you should normally be at least 18 years old with a minimum of 2 A Level passes or equivalent.
 - Applications to the course are made directly to the School through our online application portal.
- Students from a wide range of ages and backgrounds

are selected by audition and interview, with no previous acting experience required.

The International College of Musical Theatre (ICMT)

68 Wallis Road, Hackney Wick, London E9 5LH

tel 020-7253 3118

email info@theicmt.com

website www.theicmt.com

Principals/Directors Kenneth Avery-Clark, Christie Miller

Courses offered:

- One Year EU Bespoke Musical Theatre Course (train in London and Hamburg)
- One Year Level 4 Diploma in Musical Theatre Foundation Course
- 3 Month Top-up Musical Theatre Course
- 2 Year Accelerated BA (Hons) Musical Theatre Performance

Specific academic requirements apply for the BA (Hons) program. Entry is by audition only. Applicants must be skilled in at least 2 of the 3 disciplines: acting, singing, dance. Train for a week in New York (one year course).

Welcomes candidates with disabilities and will consider each on a case-by-case basis, according to the strength of their audition.

International School of Screen Acting

The Old Lab, 3 Mills Studios, Three Mills Lane, London E3 3DU

tel 020-8709 8719

email enquiries@screenacting.co.uk

website www.screenacting.co.uk

Facebook /screenactingUK

X/Twitter @ScreenActingUK

Instagram @ScreenActingUK

Key contact Sigute Ballico

Founded in 2002, ISSA is the leading specialist screen acting school in the UK. It runs as a full-time screen-acting school dedicated to preparing actors for today's TV and film industry. Based within 3 Mills Studios, the school is at the heart of a creative and successful media village.

Full-time acting courses:

- One Year Full Time Intensive Screen Acting
- 2 Year Screen Acting

Italia Conti Academy*

Italia Conti, 2 Henry Place, Victoria Way, Woking, Surrey GU21 6BU

email info@italiaconti.co.uk

website www.italiaconti.com

Head of School of Acting Bradley Hawkins

Offers comprehensive acting courses for aspiring actor-artists in the performing arts industry. The practical training and professional development

programmes equip students with the skills and knowledge to excel as versatile actors across stage, screen, and audio platforms. It is one of the country's leading institutions for vocational acting courses with an emphasis on professional development and employability.

Full-time acting courses:

Entry requirements: Age: 18+ by August 31st in the year of entry. GCSE Level 2 English and Maths (Grade 4 or above) or equivalent. 64 UCAS points or recognition of non-standard entry qualifications/experience.

- BA (Hons) Acting (3 years). In-depth training preparing students for professional acting. Enhances technical skills, artistic versatility, and personal growth.
- CertHE Introduction to Acting (1 year). Lays foundation for full-time actor's training. Provides a comprehensive introduction to acting principles.

Postgraduate courses:

- MA Creative Arts Practice (15 months full time, 30 months part time). Online.
- MA Creative Arts Education (15 months full time, 30 months part time). Online.

Other courses offered:

- Musical Theatre (BA, Diploma, CertHE)
- Dance (BA, Diploma, CertHE)
- Online and Short courses

LAMDA (London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art)*

155 Talgarth Road, London W14 9DA

tel 020-8834 0500

email enquiries@lamda.ac.uk

website www.lamda.ac.uk

LAMDA (London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art) is the oldest drama school in the UK and a world-leading conservatoire, providing exceptional vocational training through full-time and short courses. LAMDA prepares actors, directors and theatre practitioners for thriving careers in the creative arts. You can see their alumni at the National Theatre, the RSC, Shakespeare's Globe, on London's West End, on Broadway and on the BBC, HBO, Netflix, Apple TV+ and the big screen.

In 2021 LAMDA was granted full degree awarding powers. In 2023 LAMDA opened new state-of-the-art facilities to train students in virtual production and motion capture after receiving £1.9 million in funding from the Office for Students. LAMDA has a range of scholarships and bursaries available to ensure that the most talented students can access training, regardless of their financial circumstances. Committed to recruiting on talent alone, LAMDA auditions and/or interviews everyone who submits an application by the advertised deadline, providing they meet the age requirements for the training. Does not ask applicants for specific academic qualifications but instead looks for passion and a commitment to learn.

Full-time acting courses:

- BA (Hons) Professional Acting (3 years). Minimum entry age is 18. Admission is by audition and interview.
- MA Classical Acting for the Professional Theatre (1 year). This course is for students with a BA or BFA degree or equivalent. Students without this qualification must demonstrate a comparable level of knowledge and experience gained in a professional company or vocational drama school. Admission is by audition and interview.
- MA Directing (1 year).
- MA Musical Theatre (1 year).
- MFA Classical Acting: Performance & Practice (18 months). Minimum entry age is 18, but due to the experience necessary for this course, most students will be 21 and over and hold a first degree in a relevant subject.
- MFA Professional Acting (2 years). Minimum entry age is 18, but due to the experience necessary for this course, most students will be 21 and over and hold a first degree in a relevant subject.
- MFA Musical Theatre (18 months).
- Foundation in Stage and Screen (CertHe) (6 months). Minimum entry age is 18. Admission is by audition and/or interview.

Please visit www.lamda.ac.uk for further details, application deadlines and fees, as well as information on all other LAMDA courses.

The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA)*

Mount Street, Liverpool L1 9HF

tel 0151 330 3000

email admissions@lipa.ac.uk

website www.lipa.ac.uk

Facebook /LIPALiverpool

X/Twitter @LIPALiverpool

Instagram @lipaliverpool

Principal & CEO Professor Sean McNamara

LIPA offers the following acting courses – Foundation Acting (Stage & Screen), Foundation Acting (Musical Theatre), BA (Hons) Acting, BA (Hons) Acting (Musicianship), BA (Hons) Acting (Musical Theatre), BA Hons Acting (Screen & Digital Media), MA Acting.

Full-time acting courses:

- Foundation Acting (Stage & Screen) and Foundation Acting (Musical Theatre) (1 year). Aimed at people who are passionate about a career as an actor or in musical theatre but not quite ready for a conservatoire-level degree course. It's an opportunity to immerse yourself in rigorous training that will prepare you for auditions, accredited drama school and degree-level training.
- BA (Hons) Acting (3 years). This course focuses on the individual. You are not just an actor, but also an artist. At LIPA you can become an independent,

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inventive practitioner. You can be someone who harnesses what's unique to you and tackles diverse performance styles across different platforms.

- BA (Hons) Acting (Musicianship) (3 years). LIPA offers training that prepares actors with instrumental skills for rehearsal, performance, production, interdisciplinary creation, and industry engagement.
- BA (Hons) Acting (Musical Theatre) (3 years). This intensive and practical course aims to create highly skilled actors who are accomplished singers and dancers. These multi-faceted performers will be equipped to work in classic and contemporary musical theatre.
- BA (Hons) Acting (Screen & Digital Media) (3 years). Our intensive and practical course focuses on fundamental technical acting skills, while putting you at the cutting edge of acting for screen and digital platforms.
- MA Acting (1 year). This intensive and highly practical MA will enable you to develop and enhance your acting skills to a professional level. Guided by LIPA's world-class teaching team you will become part of a creative and collaborative community.

Liverpool Theatre School/Liverpool Central Studios

35 Sefton Road, Liverpool L8 5SL

tel 0151 728 7800

email info@liverpoolcentralstudios.com

website www.liverpoolcentralstudios.com/

liverpooltheatreschool

Facebook /LiverpoolTheatreSchool

X/Twitter @LTSchool

Instagram @liverpooltheatreschool

Performing arts centre based in the heart of Liverpool offering the highest standard of training from beginners' classes to full-time professional training. Aims to produce musical theatre performers, dancers and actors that have the skills, knowledge and attitude to be successful in an increasingly demanding profession. Application form can be downloaded online and sent to

auditions@liverpoolcentralstudios.com.

Courses offered:

- BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Musical Theatre.
- Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre (Level 6) (3 years).
- Diploma in Professional Dance – Contemporary Dance (Level 5) (2 years).
- Diploma in Professional Dance (Level 6) (3 years).

London School of Dramatic Art

4 Bute Street, London SW7 3EX

tel 020-7581 6100

email enquiries@lsda-acting.com

website www.lsda-acting.com

Facebook /LSDA.Acting

X/Twitter @LSDA_Acting

Instagram @lsda_acting

Principal Jake Taylor, Administrator Emma Rogerson

Offers a range of comprehensive courses designed to develop individual creative talents, and to provide a thorough grounding in all aspects of performance as part of a student's preparation for a working life as an actor. There is currently no wheelchair access to the main building or training rooms: if this affects applicants who would like to know when these spaces become accessible, please let the school know. All auditions are free and no international student fees are charged. No formal qualifications are required as the training is vocational: "We look more at potential and at levels of creativity."

Full-time courses:

- Advanced Diploma in Acting (1 year). No public funding available. Applications should be made to the school by the end of September. Applicants must be aged 18 or over.
- Foundation Diploma in Acting (1 year). No public funding available. Applications should be made direct to the school by the end of September. Applicants must be aged 18 or over.

London School of Musical Theatre

83 Borough Road, London SE1 1DN

tel 020-7407 4455

email info@lsmt.co.uk

email auditions@lsmt.co.uk

website www.lsmt.co.uk

Facebook /LondonSchoolMusicalTheatre

X/Twitter @TheLSMT

Instagram @thelsmt

Principal & Course Producer Adrian Jeckells

Full-time courses:

- Musical Theatre Diploma Course (1 year). Age range for entry is 18–35.

London Studio Centre (LSC)

artsdepot, 5 Nether Street, Tally Ho Corner,

North Finchley, London N12 0GA

tel 020-7837 7741

email info@londonstudiocentre.ac.uk

website www.londonstudiocentre.org

Facebook /LdnStudioCentre

X/Twitter @LdnStudioCentre

Instagram @ldnstudiocentre

Director Nic Espinosa, Dean of Studies Robert Penman

London Studio Centre is a professional dance conservatoire accredited by the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre (CDMT).

Courses include:

- BA (Hons) Theatre Dance (validated by Middlesex University)
- FdA Professional Dance Performance (validated by the University for the Creative Arts)

- BA (Hons) Professional Performance (top up) (validated by the University for the Creative Arts)
- MA Dance Performance (validated by Middlesex University)
- MA Dance Producing and Management (validated by Middlesex University)
- MA Dance Education/PG Cert Teaching Professional Theatre Dance (validated by the University for the Creative Arts)
- Foundation Course
- London Studio Centre Associate Programmes

LSC's facilities include state-of-the-art dance and drama studios and access to fully equipped theatres.

LSC graduates are regularly seen performing on stage in London's West End and in international dance companies.

Manchester School of Theatre at MMU*

Cavendish Street, Manchester M15 6BG

website www.theatre.mmu.ac.uk

Programme Leader BA (Hons) Acting David Salter

Full-time acting courses:

- BA (Hons) Acting (3 years full-time). Applicants must be aged 18 or over with 3 A levels or equivalent. Applications should be made through UCAS by January.
- BA (Hons) Drama and Contemporary Performance (3 years, full-time; 6 years, part-time). Applicants must be 18 or over with 3 A levels or equivalent. Applications should be made through UCAS.
- MA/MFA Performance. Applicants must be aged 21 or over with a degree in a related subject. (1 year/18 months).

Mountview*

120 Peckham Hill Street, London SE15 5JT

tel 020-8881 2201

email enquiries@mountview.org.uk

website www.mountview.org.uk

Facebook /mountviewldn

X/Twitter @mountviewLDN

Instagram @mountviewldn

Principal Sally Ann Gritton

Full-time acting courses: Applications for the courses listed below should be made direct to the school.

BAs validated by the University of East Anglia and Trinity College London. Applicants must be aged 18 or over at the start of the course. Entry is based on performance at audition, previous formal academic qualifications are not essential. Dance and Drama Awards are available for a significant number of students.

- BA (Hons) Acting (3 years).
- BA (Hons) Actor Musicianship (3 years).
- BA (Hons) Musical Theatre (3 years).

MAs validated by the University of East Anglia. Applicants must be aged 21 years or over at the start of the course. Students who do not hold an undergraduate degree will need to undertake an access assignment to establish suitability for undertaking the MA.

- MA Creative Producing (1 year)
- MA Musical Direction (1 year)
- MA Performance - Acting (1 year)
- MA Performance - Musical Theatre (1 year)
- MA Theatre for Community and Education (2 years part-time)
- MA Site-Specific Theatre Practice (1 year)
- MA Theatre Directing (1 year)
- MFA Intimacy Practice (2 years)

Oxford School of Drama*

Sansomes Farm Studios, Woodstock,

Oxford OX20 1ER

tel (01993) 812883

email info@oxforddrama.ac.uk

website www.oxforddrama.ac.uk

Facebook /TheOxfordSchoolofDrama

X/Twitter @oxford_drama

Instagram @oxford_drama

Principal Edward Hicks

The smallest of the drama schools, it has a 94% employment rate and an 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating. Provides a significant number of Dance and Drama Awards and Advanced Learning Loans for its one- and 3-year courses. Also offers its own Hardship fund which is distributed each year to students on full-time courses at the school. Students not in receipt of a DaDA are prioritised for funding. The Sir John Gielgud Charitable Trust currently supports the school and, in addition, students have also won the Laurence Olivier Bursary, the Spotlight Prize, the Alan Bates Award and the BBC Carleton Hobbs bursary award.

Full-time acting courses: Applications for the courses listed below should be made direct to the school.

- 3 Year Acting Course. Applicants must be aged 18 or over.
- One Year Acting Course. Applicants must be aged 21 or over.

Courses validated by Trinity College London and Equity membership is award to all who complete the course.

Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA)*

62-64 Gower Street, London WC1E 6ED

tel 020-7636 7076

email enquiries@rada.ac.uk

website www.rada.ac.uk

Facebook /RoyalAcademyofDramaticArt

X/Twitter @RADA_London

Instagram @royalacademyofdramaticart

Principal Niamh Dowling

20 Training

RADA offers vocational training for actors, stage managers, designers and technical stage craft specialists.

Full-time undergraduate and postgraduate courses:

- BA (Hons) in Acting
- MA Theatre Lab
- Foundation Course in Acting (non-HE)
- Foundation Degree (FdA) in Technical Theatre and Stage Management
- BA (Hons) in Technical Theatre and Stage Management (progression year)
- Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) in Theatre Costume

RADA training is practical, intensive and rigorous, and offers the highest level of teaching with unparalleled links to the industry, and an impressive track record of graduate employment as award-winners and leaders in their field. Across theatre, film, television and radio, graduates are employed as actors, directors, writers, producers; lighting, sound, costume and prop designers, scenic artists; stage managers and production managers.

Also creates opportunities for the wider community to engage with training through short courses and widening participation and outreach work.

Rose Bruford College*

Lamorby Park, Burnt Oak Lane, Sidcup DA15 9DF
tel 020-8308 2600

email enquiries@bruford.ac.uk

website www.bruford.ac.uk

Instagram @rosebruford

Acting Principal & CEO Mary Oliver

Full-time acting courses: Applicants for the BA degree courses listed below must be over the age of 18 with the equivalent of a minimum of 2 A levels at grade C or above. BA Applications should be made through UCAS. Applicants for MA courses should be aged 21 or over and apply through the college website.

- BA (Hons) Acting (3 years)
- BA (Hons) Actor Musicianship (3 years)
- BA (Hons) Actor Training (3 years)
- BA (Hons) American Theatre Arts (3 years)
- BA (Hons) Contemporary and Popular Performance (3 years)
- BA (Hons) European Theatre Arts (3 years)
- BA (Hons) Theatre and Social Change (3 years)
- MA Actor and Performer Training (1 year)
- MA Actor Musicianship (1 year)
- MA Collaborative Theatre Making (1 year)
- MA International Theatre Practice and Performance (1 year)
- MA Professional Acting (1 year)
- MA Queer Performance (15 months)
- MA Theatre for Young Audiences (1 year)

Royal Academy of Music

Musical Theatre Department, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5HT

tel 020-7873 7373

website www.ram.ac.uk/study/departments/musical-theatre

Gatsby Chair of Musical Theatre Daniel Bowling MMUS

Students are enrolled at the Royal Academy of Music, an institution of world renown, training students for more than 190 years. Students study for University of London degrees. Fellow students include instrumentalists, composers, jazz and commercial musicians, pianists and opera singers.

Full-time acting courses:

- MA Musical Theatre (1 year). Aimed at graduates, mature students and experienced performers wishing to undertake a career in musical theatre. The course provides an intensive training in singing, acting, movement and voice to students of postgraduate (or equivalent) level. Includes extensive one-to-one tuition with expert tutors and industry showcase, projects for invited industry guests and public performances.
- Musical Theatre (PGCert) (1 year).

Royal Birmingham Conservatoire*

200 Jennens Road, Birmingham B4 7XG

tel 0121 331 5000

email conservatoire@bcu.ac.uk

website www.bcu.ac.uk/conservatoire/acting

Facebook /RoyalBirmCons

X/Twitter @BirmCons

Instagram @mybcu

Principal Stephen Maddock, Vice Principal (Acting)

Stephen Simms

Full-time acting courses:

- BA Applied Theatre
- BA Stage Management
- BA Acting
- MA/MFA/PgDip Acting
- MA/MFA/PgDip Professional Voice Practice

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama*

ROYAL CENTRAL

SCHOOL OF SPEECH & DRAMA

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

University of London, Eton Avenue, London NW3 3HY

tel 020-7722 8183

email openevents@cssd.ac.uk

website www.cssd.ac.uk

Principal Josette Bushell Mingo OBE

Scholarships/Bursaries Central has a range of scholarships and bursaries available for students on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Visit the website for further details.

Undergraduate courses:**Performance**

- BA (Hons) Acting: Stage and Screen
- BA (Hons) Acting: Collaborative and Devised Performance
- BA (Hons) Acting: Musical Theatre

Practice

- BA (Hons) Drama and Applied Theatre
- BA (Hons) Experimental Arts and Performance
- BA (Hons) Writing for Performance

Producing

- BA (Hons) Costume Production
- BA (Hons) Performance Design
- BA (Hons) Production Arts: Props, Painting and Set
- BA (Hons) Production Technologies and Stage Management

All applications to be made via UCAS by 29 January 2025.

Postgraduate courses:

Central offers a range of specialist MA course for those holding an undergraduate degree or with relevant experience. 2-year MFAs are also available in some course areas. All postgraduate applications should be made direct through Central's website.

- Acting Classical
- Acting Contemporary
- Acting for Screen
- Actor Training and Coaching
- Advanced Theatre Practice
- Applied Theatre
- Creative Producing
- Drama and Movement Therapy
- Movement: Directing and Teaching
- Musical Theatre: Acting and Performance
- Scenography
- Voice Studies: Teaching and Coaching
- Writing for Stage and Broadcast Media

Royal Conservatoire of Scotland*

100 Renfrew Street, Glasgow G2 3DB

tel 0141 332 4101

email admissions@rcs.ac.uk

website www.rcs.ac.uk

Facebook /rcsofficial

X/Twitter @RCStweets

Instagram @rcsofficial

Principal Jeffrey Sharkey, Head of Acting Joyce Deans

Scotland's national Conservatoire, based in the heart of Glasgow. Offers the very best education and opportunities to students from across the world, and each year welcomes students from more than fifty countries. Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is consistently recognised as one of the world's top

performing arts education institutions by QS World Rankings, achieving consistent rankings in the 10 top between 2020–24, cementing its position as a global leader in performing arts education.

Full-time acting courses: Applications for the undergraduate courses listed below should be made via www.ucas.com/ucas/conservatoires by 29 January 2025. Applications for postgraduate courses listed below should be made via www.ucas.com/ucas/conservatoires by 29 January 2025. Please email admissions@rcs.ac.uk for more information.

Courses available:

- BA Acting (full-time, 3 years)
- BA Performance in BSL and English (full-time, 3 years)
- BA Musical Theatre (full-time, 3 years)
- Professional Graduate Diploma in Musical Directing (full-time, 1 year)
- MA Musical Theatre - Musical Directing (full-time, 1 year)
- MA Classical and Contemporary Text - Acting/ Directing (full-time, 1 year)
- MFA Classical and Contemporary Text - Acting/ Directing (full-time, 16 months)

Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama*

Castle Grounds, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3ER

tel 029-2039 1361

email admissions@rwcmd.ac.uk

website www.rwcmd.ac.uk/study/acting,

www.rwcmd.ac.uk/study/musical-theatre

Full-time acting courses:

Applications should be made through UCAS Conservatoires and not directly to the college.

- BA (Hons) Acting (3 years). Applicants should normally be at least 18 years old by the time of enrolment. There is a range of support in place to help cover the cost of tuition, the details of which will depend on where the student normally lives.
- BA (Hons) Musical Theatre (3 years). Applicants should normally be at least 18 years old by the time of enrolment. There is a range of support in place to help cover the cost of tuition, the details of which will depend on where the student normally lives.
- MA in Acting for Stage, Screen and Radio (4 terms – September until January). Applicants should normally be at least 21 years old by the time of enrolment.
- MA in Musical Theatre (3 terms – January until December). Applicants should normally be at least 21 years old by the time of enrolment.

What are drama schools looking for?

Geoffrey Colman

A lifelong contract

Many drama school applicants underestimate the fact that becoming an actor is about signing a sort of lifelong and extraordinary contract that contains the most incredible clause – one that requires the artist to metaphorically go to places both dark and light, to represent, live and die for us. Seven times a week or in fourteen takes. To successfully navigate such challenges one must possess a licence, for to ‘go there’ is not something that everybody can or wants to do. Not everybody has the talent. Not everybody is prepared to dedicate the years of preparation required to become an actor. Alas, many also underestimate the phenomenal personal responsibility of such an undertaking and delude themselves that it can be achieved by just wanting it very much – like a child wants ice-cream. I have not found this to be the case.

With the ongoing accusations of institutional racism and cultural elitism that the wider cultural sector continue to address, the drama school has also had to confront its now historic idea of training, and think again, very seriously, about how it can be something more than just a place for a few hand-picked individuals. As the enormity of the 2020 global pandemic became desperately apparent, the operational challenges faced by many drama schools in the UK – how to train its talented students online, remotely, far away from their world-famous studios; were superseded by longer-held, ethical questions about what tradition, in the light of ‘Black Lives Matter’ and ‘Me Too’ even meant – and certainly what it looked like. Whilst classes and rehearsals temporarily moved onto zoom, the sector set about reimagining its curriculum in the longer term. A post-pandemic return, never again legitimizing discourses that had historically reproduced particular forms of classed, ‘raced’ and gendered exclusion. The conservatoire always, famously, aspired to the idea of industry ‘nearness’ but its historic enactment of this was formed by a profession awash with poor practices, received normative paradigms, prejudices and general professional ‘truths’ handed down as performance rules or lineage. The training sector has responded with urgent forcible change, and whilst their historic studios may remain the same, the environment in which professional training now happens is both alert to its past failings and hugely ambitious of real long-lasting positive change.

The professional or conservatoire sector comprises schools that subscribe to, and are measured by, a set of overarching industry-approved principles held by the Federation of Drama Schools (FDS) www.federationofdramaschools.co.uk. The core principles state that the selection process is by audition, and that training will be professionally aligned, intensive, and delivering at least 900 hours of practical contact teaching a year. Many thousands apply to the FDS schools each year, for a precious few places. Of course, conservatoire training is not for everyone. There are many university drama departments where the courses, whilst not offering 30+ professional contact hours per week, do offer a vast range of performance-related academic disciplines that can be studied both theoretically and practically. Such programmes, though perhaps less specialist, do offer the student excellent opportunities to act, write, and direct whilst developing their own individual performance interests and skills.

Recent years have seen emerge a vast catalogue of non-professional diploma and degree-awarding courses offering performance-related study and preparation. Often curated by established conservatoires, such courses give the less experienced performer invaluable insight into the ways of the conservatoire system, and are particularly useful when considering whether professional actor training is a viable option.

What are you looking for? Do your research

Despite the existence of excellent regulating bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency – which sets important benchmarks for the delivery of training, published student surveys and the names of famous alumni – across the conservatoire drama schools there is significant variation in terms of funding (including tuition top-up fees), quality of training, award outcomes (certificate, diploma, degree), and most certainly graduate employment prospects, which differ from school to school. So never mind the question about what are drama schools looking for – what are *you* looking for? Most candidates have such a limited, almost passive, expectation about what drama schools want at audition, and of the actual training itself. The first task is, therefore, not to perfect some extraordinarily well-honed accent or radical audition monologue interpretation, but rather, many months prior to this process, to undertake a sleeves-rolled-up systematic approach to a lot of very necessary research into the sector itself. If you are going to commit three years of your life to something, you really should find out what that something is!

All drama schools and university drama departments publish their entry requirements in either a glossy prospectus or more typically on a website, but, as such, these only really describe required entry criteria, a brief course outline and, in the case of some drama schools, a list of suggested classical audition speeches. Drama schools require potential students to audition, whilst it is not unusual for the university sector to offer some, but not all, candidates an interview and workshop. Entry requirements and selection criteria vary from institution to institution, but in general terms, the university sector is looking for well-qualified students with excellent A-level or equivalent qualifications. The conservatoire sector, on the other hand, bases its selection much more on audition success than exam grades, and is looking for ‘evidence of ongoing commitment to acting’ (such as having played featured roles in youth theatre production companies), ‘evidence of a trainable voice and body’, ‘evidence of intellectual, emotional and physical skills’, and so on. These competencies are all there waiting on the audition panellist’s check list. There is not a section that refers to ‘tingle factor’ or ‘star quality’ because this is only found on the fame TV panellist’s laminated sheet. Equally, there isn’t an additional sub-criteria requirement listing particular body types to balance future casting designs not yet discussed.

The choice of audition speech preoccupies many candidates who unearth an astounding range of two-minute extracts – often inappropriately sourced from internet material that disallows any creative placement of their own heart and mind. Don’t obsess about contrasting this or the other. Just select an extract from a play that is simple, clear, unfussy and – most important of all – one that allows for you to enter its world without a fight (and most certainly without the need to show that you are entering it). People do bring much worked-upon accents, props, shouts, peculiar moves, glances and screams, as though volume alone will do the trick. This should be avoided. Remember, too, that audition panellists experience the gamut of human suffering in two-minute chunks. But emotion in itself is not the gold medal if it is false, inappropriate or showy (especially without real

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context). The audition day is not merely there to equip the candidate with a jolly site tour or a space within which to recite a contrasting classical and contemporary speech. It might even, just possibly, offer some sort of snatched insight into how the course might be taught. To enter the world of drama school depends upon something far more fundamental than a set of well-worn, clichéd, seen-it-in-the-movies assumptions.

Both the conservatoire and university sector see the value of Open Day events – and so should you. The real answers required are sometimes just a little bit more abstract. Open Days afford a terrific and all-important onsite ‘experience’ of the building, its community of staff and students, and general but –nevertheless important – ‘feel’ of the place. Training institutions have rightly been questioned about how they construct their communities and, in particular, what they are doing to increase diversity. A recent parliamentary enquiry into access and diversity in the performing arts concluded that, despite many positive initiatives, drama schools needed to reform. One long-held perception that is difficult to dispel is that the whole audition process is very expensive. Whereas university drama departments accept applications via a centralised UCAS system, drama schools also ask for an additional fee. Many of the conservatoires within the Federation of Drama Schools now offer audition-fee waivers – offering free or heavily subsidized auditions to those facing the greatest barriers to attending.

If possible, attend a few plays or musicals performed by final-year students from different schools or departments as this can be extremely useful in that it demonstrates a very public slice of the quality of teaching and professional guidance offered. Once started, this level of cultural forensic work will certainly enable you to identify at least where you would like to study. But why do you want to become an actor? This is the real question that you must ask. Not so that you can decorate your application form or personal statement with incredible, but quite useless, prose (as often audition candidates do), but rather, align all future coordinates to it. You will need to refer to this answer for the rest of your life.

Audition actively, with clarity and commitment

It was the jaded theatre producer Emmanuel Azenberg who pessimistically described how successful entry into the ranks of the professional Broadway musical chorus required an alarming, but necessary, process of becoming a kind of *fabulous invalid* – a gradual giving up of self and becoming unable to do or cope with anything other than being in the chorus itself – never really knowing who deals the cards – and, in fact, never really knowing what the game is in the first place! Having been involved with drama school auditions for many years, I would suggest that his observation might just as well apply as a cautionary tale to those many thousands of audition candidates that approach the day with all-too-little consideration for the task and commitment ahead.

The craft of acting is not limited to a single method or approach; it is joyfully promiscuous. But for every actor we witness on our screens or in the theatre itself we also encounter a different sort of promiscuity. Some actors are famously trained and some are just famous, possessing a peculiar, but much desired, cultural tag. The ‘celebrity’ is often ‘untrained’, but connected to the performance industry by events that afford measurable charisma, enigma or sensation. As such celebrities may not in the short term need a drama school training, but rather, a constant stream of tabloid stories showing hasty late-night retreats from exclusive bars and restaurants. Such activities can (and occasionally do) open doors and give entry into the industry – but the hinges that hold them are tissue-thin – and the doors will not always remain permanently open!

Look diligently before you leap

Training is not casual, but quite conservative and very ordered indeed. One class follows another and then another. How do you fit into this delightful regime? It can be repetitive and exhausting. The panel will look for signs of someone who can cope with this or not. A professional training is a physical, emotional, muscular assimilation of many processes. Learning lines is not the issue – but learning the difficult routine and discipline of acting can be. The audition is as much about assessing this point as to whether a given Juliet or Hamlet is believable.

Like many momentous occasions in life the drama school audition can be so very memorable. Like the first day of the school summer holidays or the first page of a new novel or even your first kiss. For there to be a first day at drama school is an achievement in itself. And yet to audition is to be part of an occasion mixed with both excitement and fear. Excitement in that all the waiting and preparation is over – but also fear regarding what happens if a place is not offered. To be an acting student at a conservatoire drama school is not to be part of something that is either casual or meaningless. But success in the current climate is now also measured by other indicators. Most students juggle outside work commitments with a very heavy workload of study and somehow exist on far less money than is possible. Drama school training is impacting – it marks all those who experience it. Yes every move, every gesture and vocal shift is catalogued for later dissection. But this is why to be trained is not to take an unfathomable leap in the dark. Sacrifices will have to be made and we must ensure that in the new funding climate becoming an artist will not render a fearful voiceless future to all but a privileged few.

What drama schools want is to restore the helplessness of our own lives through the long productive and meaningful careers of future artists like you. Don't take an unfathomable leap. Only if you're utterly convinced should you sign the training contract – but prepare for this moment with diligence, care and humility. Good luck!

Geoffrey Colman works as a professional acting coach in theatre, film and TV, having been Professor/Head of Acting at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama for many years. See more at www.geoffcolman.com.

Reframing the future of actor training

Pamela Jikiemi

For much of the 20th century, the entertainment industry was dominated by theatre. Highly regarded venues in the heartland of theatre in London's prestigious West End and renowned companies like the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and what is now the Royal National Theatre (NT) set the standard for theatrical excellence.

Conservatoire drama schools teaching actor training extensively over 36+ contact hours a week, at a minimum of five to six days a week, over three years, offered the gold standard of vocational, intensive, rigorous, classical actor training. This conservatoire model focused purely on the development of craft, training the actor's imagination, voice, body and physicality, exploring stagecraft and presence towards gaining the ability to not only feel a lot, but to feel it on demand to enable the ability to live truthfully in imaginary circumstances and perform first and foremost in front of a live audience.

This classical training, with its emphasis on Shakespeare, Ancient Greek, Restoration and Jacobean drama, had been taught from the viewpoint of differing practitioners, most of which sprung from Constantin Stanislavski and his codified approach. The vocal delivery was required to come from the base of the speech system predicated around Received Pronunciation (RP). The repertory theatre (rep) circuit, where an actor could build on their training by switching roles two or three times a week, had been the main point of entry for aspiring actors trained as well as the untrained. However, provincial audiences were increasingly unwilling to pay to see a cast of unknowns continue their practical education on the rep circuit. Television and the development of continuing drama increasingly provided that 'learning on the job' function.

The rep circuit was, therefore, on the wane by the time I was offered a place at drama school and yet repertory theatre had been my main reason for applying. My plan had been to train at drama school and then join a repertory company to embed the training, which to me seemed straightforward. But being the only Black and Global Majority student at the drama school I attended at that time, I soon came to realise that British Black and Global Majority actors had long struggled to gain acceptance into the profession. This was due to a few reasons but mainly as highlighted by the activist Naseem Khan in 1975.

Naseem Khan's (1975) survey, 'The Arts that Britain Ignores', was seminal in its breadth exploring the contribution to the arts landscape from diasporic communities. Khan was the first to highlight 'the proportion of Black students at drama schools' in Britain. It was the first publication of its kind to actively explore the nature and numbers of Black and Global Majority acting students enrolled at Britain's leading drama conservatoire schools in the mid-1970s. Khan investigated the relationship between actor training, stage management, the actor's union and the performing arts industry. She documented what she identified as informal practices,¹ which appeared to be excluding 'ethnic minorities' from taking part and being visible across the creative sector. The discriminatory practices that

¹ Naseem Khan's results found that of the fifteen Black students of an intake of 675 in the nation's top twenty drama schools, five were international students.

Kahn outlined in her report were further highlighted by the *Guardian*. In 1975, the national newspaper reported that:

...for years at least one institution, the Central School of Speech and Drama, has been taking on its few Afro-Asian protégés on the understanding that they'll only stay for a term in their third year – the showcase year when students get their chance to shine – because frankly there just aren't enough Black parts to go around. (29 April 1975 n.a.n.p. BTMF).

The Central School of Speech and Drama was not the only drama conservatoire that practised this policy; however, it was the only one to go on record at the time confirming its institutional use. I experienced this being 'let go' in the second year of my drama school training in the late 1980s. It was the intervention by my parents and the suggestion of legal action which stayed their hand. Nonetheless, the subsequent casting in my third year was virtually non-existent. I was cast as a Kit Kat Girl in *Cabaret* but was cut in the second half with the proviso that 'no Blacks would have survived in Germany at that time'. Goodbye to Berlin for me indeed it was. Khan's report set out the inequities experienced by Black and Global Majority actors in the training sector, the industry and the actor's union Equity.² Actors' Equity union, at that time, operated as a closed shop: non-completion of the full training meant actors were ineligible for the union Equity card and which meant subsequently they had no access to paid professional employment opportunities. No card, no work. This was problematic due the fact that British theatre was the primary platform for actors to build their careers and reputations. Theatre at that time enjoyed high cultural prestige and status, attracting international critical acclaim, financial investment and significant public interest.

Fast-forward some 45 years and, in June 2020, acting conservatoires clamoured to publish Black Lives Matter statements in the wake of George Floyd's murder and worldwide anti-racism protests. The backlash from students to the premise of these statements was seismic. Acting conservatoires across the UK faced serious allegations from students for failing to address systemic and institutional racism, regionalism, inappropriate behaviour and the lack of safeguarding. Students were publicly questioning their training experience and what seemed to be an ongoing intransigence within conservatoires towards addressing real, meaningful, representational change. In light of all the allegations, an independent inquiry, conducted on behalf of one of the schools led by a then Queen's Council legal team, commented that the issues raised in their report around discriminatory practices were not limited to any institution but widespread across United Kingdom drama schools.

Somethings needed to change. That change came and it was precipitated by the global pandemic and the subsequent global lockdown.

The global lockdown accelerated a couple of areas that were significant points of tension within actor training. The first was the exploration of reframing representation in the pedagogy and the second was modernisation with the integration of digital innovation within traditional classical actor training and technical theatre and stage management training.

While the world was in lockdown, actors were able to build an online rapport and generate an audience by creating, performing and marketing their own work through the fast-growing arena of social media. This created a new dynamic for all actors, which has

² British Actor's Equity Association, known as Equity, operated as a 'closed shop' union until the 1980s when closed shop unions became illegal in the UK.

continued to build, but particularly regarding visibility and presence for actors who had previously been marginalised, who were now able to gain exposure far beyond the confines of a physical UK stage.

Streaming platforms want to capture the minds, disposable income, hearts and eyeballs of a global audience. This has created a new dynamic around the type of stories and subject matter being explored, whether they are narratives based on true life events or commissioned fictional drama. Many more creatives are now able to take their representational stories and explore the space to negotiate creating or reimagining them from stage to screen and increasingly from screen to stage. Conservatoire actor training in the UK needs to embrace the benefits of the rise of the streamed multi-platform content and the multifaceted opportunities it presents, especially regarding representation, equality and inclusion. The impact of these changes offers the conservatoire and their graduates the potential to have a global reach, as screened content can be viewed worldwide, on demand increasing visibility and accessibility.

Streaming services and platforms that had been steadily rising in subscription take-up have exploded since the pandemic. Netflix, one of the biggest streaming platforms in the world and still growing, placed representation full screen, showcasing Shonda Rhimes's *Bridgerton*, a seminal period drama set in Regency England during the time of King George III's reign. It has been seen as a disruptor to the British ideological tradition of British actor training and on-screen portrayals of period history, race and class. The images and myths that have been taken for granted in the traditional British screen portrayal of period drama as part of the world of entertainment more often than not have deep historical roots and perpetuate evocative powerful, persuasive, ideological traditions. However, if *Bridgerton* subverted the period drama genre by creating an explosion of real debate around British history, representation, race, class and the white male/female gaze, then Rapman's 2024 *Supacell* (also a Netflix commission) has taken the debate around the entire drama genre quite literally into another much more powerfully persuasive representational multi-universe.

Streaming platforms have revolutionized the entertainment industry, significantly affecting theatre, film and the UK's terrestrial television channels. They are increasingly entering into multi-year first-look development, financing and production deals with multi-hyphenate management agencies for feature films. For actors, understanding this shift is critical. For acting conservatoires recognising and reframing the training is crucial.

British graduating actors now compete with a much broader international pool of talent, including those with significant screen credits, who may not have pursued the conservatoire route. This has seen a talent drain whereby actors have left the UK to build a career in America. This is due to the perception that opportunities, particularly for Black and Global majority actors, are much more readily available there compared to the UK and there is a much more open mindset towards who can play what and why.

There is a new symbiosis between theatre and screen that did not previously exist. Now, having significant screen credits enhances an actor's chances of being considered for prominent theatre roles. There may be several reasons for this. Actors who have screen credits often have a following from their film and screen work. They are, therefore, often much more recognisable and so able to draw in a wider range of audiences. As a result of the positive impact on ticket sales, theatrical producers are increasingly recognising the value

of creating an ensemble on stage and backstage with heightened profiles and the built-in audience that they all bring.

Alongside the role of social media and its impact, there is also the changing digital landscape that actors are increasingly being asked to connect with. Conservatoires are starting to explore the need provide their students with professional exposure to the most advanced technologies that the craft of acting and an actor's body is increasingly required to synthesise with. They have taken significant steps towards integrating the digital landscape with the training to prepare its graduates in a way that reflects what the screen and theatre industry now demands. Theatre is now becoming increasingly mediated. Digital video; live broadcast; moment-to-moment video projection; live feeds from hand-held mobile devices; immersive interaction; and vast, more enriched soundscapes and lighting of these different mediums boosts the offer of actor training and requires a modernisation of technical stage management training also.

The ubiquity of emergent technologies in the film, screen, audio and gaming sector, such as 3D Scanning Photogrammetry, Volumetric Video Capture, Motion and Performance Capture, are becoming increasingly prevalent aspects of the environment that actors are required to inhabit and experience. Whether it is wearing a motion capture suit to create the physicality and embodiment of a yet to be built 3D rendered character to working with other actors with an LED Volume Wall for the set, this latest technology creates a virtual set which means the surroundings of a sound stage are limited only by the background content.

The requirements for screen and audio acting require an outstanding level of skill, craft and trained imagination. Once on set, in the volume or audio booth, the process requires solid training techniques to support what is highly creative, disciplined, imaginative and physically demanding work. This process of connecting forward-facing actor training with emergent and advanced world-building technology is at the forefront of what it means to be a professional actor prepared for the future.

RADA, as part of its BA (Hons) Acting training and as part of my role as Head of Film, Television and Audio, produces six short films every year from professionally commissioned scripts and with a diverse professional crew. These multi award-winning films are internationally recognised for excellence and employ a range of digitally innovative scenarios that mirror the environment that actors may encounter on graduation when working on a professional production. I liaise with audio professionals to produce Commercial Voice-Over Demo Reels for inclusion in their graduate student profiles. This is an area often overlooked by conservatoires. It is through this work for the BBC that I was able to gain my equity card, despite being told at drama school in the 1980s that I 'had a good face for radio'. I have also introduced the provision of a residential 'Digital Futures' immersive training experience, working in collaboration with the Centre for Creative and Immersive eXtended Realities, University of Portsmouth, to ensure the RADA students gain a solid introduction and immersion in the use of digital technology and how they may be required to connect and interact with it in various scenarios.

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, LAMDA, Rose Bruford, East15 and Guildhall School of Music and Drama are now all starting to invest, develop and research into emergent technologies and their application, particularly in the areas of motion capture, digital innovation and performance and its inclusion as part of their undergraduate and post graduate actor-training offer.

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With the importance of self-taping and its now accepted universal use for initial casting rounds and remote auditions, technical proficiency has become a critical skill for actors. Knowing how to set up a professional-looking self-tape space, including lighting, sound, background and framing can make a significant difference towards the casting outcomes.

Modern actors must be adept at transitioning between theatre, film, television, and audio. Each medium requires a different dynamic and clear understanding of that dynamic and what is required in terms of craft by the actor. This underscores the importance of a trained imagination, transferable skills, versatility, energy and adaptability as key parts of an actor's skill set.

In 2023 actors in America went on strike for (among several things) the right to have control over their own digital image. This is a very real concern as technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly advanced. There has been an exponential explosion in environments where everyone can distribute material digitally with maximum efficiency to everyone else worldwide. Conservatoire training needs to address the implications of this to fundamentally raise awareness around actors being their own brand and how to develop and protect it.

Today an actor might well focus solely on screen work for part of their career – the streaming platforms require a certain exclusive/loyalty not unlike the big Hollywood studio system of a previous era and the rights to one's image and its usage are increasingly nebulous. But in-between screen projects they might try to squeeze in a theatrical stage play project, be commodified as the face of a major brand extolling the virtues of perfume, aftershave, high fashion. They might be facilitating presentational skills for businesses, doing motion/performance capture/voicing characters for gaming brands and/or visual effects work, narrating an audiobook or producing a podcast.

There is a much bigger and recognised diversification of craft and young actors need to have a much more heightened sense of the range of an actor's working life and how much they can do for themselves to access it. Some of the most talented young actors today never trained at drama school yet are consistently in work moving fluidly between screen and stage. Training may not have been an option for any number of reasons, but these actors are in demand, and they are focused, disciplined, open, agile and learning on the job.

Can conservatoires in the UK consider meaningful change for the better and explore the progressivism needed to reframe the term 'classical' acting and technical training to create artists for the future? Conservatoire actor training requires focus, talent, determination, resilience and a willingness to make mistakes and to want to learn from them and move forward. Conservatoire actor training provides a set of skills that ensure your longevity and adaptability yet enable you to remain open and continue to learn throughout your life. Conservatoire actor training is not to be taken lightly – you must want to commit to learning about yourself, the world around you, and the idiosyncrasies of human behaviour and thinking. You need to develop analytical skills with your mind, which you then communicate through your body.

When exploring and deciding which school to apply to don't confuse celebrity with craft. Celebrity and fame for their own sake do not offer you anything. Investing in the craft of acting can give you a lifelong opportunity to learn, grow, develop and give back.

Then ask yourself does this school have an identity that sets it apart from the others? Does it have a sense of history and a reputation for staying ahead of the game?

Is it representational beyond the box-ticking variety? Who are the actors whose approach to craft I admire? Did they train? If so, where and how did they feel about their training experience? What does the teaching body look like? Is it representational? Is there anyone there that looks like you? Who teaches on the course you are applying for? Does its prospectus clearly set out the range of courses available? Has care been taken in the way the material in the prospectus has been set out? Have reasonable adjustments been taken for neuro-divergent applicants so there is an equality of access to application information? Do the research.

There is a saying that it is our choices that really show us who we are and not our abilities. So if, after your audition experience, you are reviewing your choices around which drama school offer to accept and you can answer all the above questions, then you will truly recognise instinctively through your body which drama school will provide you with the form of training that will enable you to grow into the actor you know you were born to be.

No art form can survive unless it relates to its own age and fully embraces its challenges.

Pamela Jikiemi is Head of Film, Television and Audio at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), UK. She is classically trained (ALRA), holds an MA, PGCE AP, and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) and an award-winning film maker. She has commissioned and produced over 25 short films and directed four, winning the IRIS Prize for Education for a short film in 2023. She is currently a PhD candidate at University of the Arts, Chelsea. She continues to work creatively and extensively as an award-winning actor and voice actor, appearing most recently in Netflix series *Supacell*, Apple TV's *Ted Lasso*, and in BAFTA's Best Game of the Year award-winner *Baldur's Gate III*. Giving back to community is a priority for her and she is the editor of the book *Out of the Black Box: Conversations with Actors and Artists* (Methuen Drama, 2025).

The Mentor & The Void

Mark Weinman

I went charging across what I call “the void” straight from university, where I had accumulated what I thought was a pretty impressive list of credits with the drama society. In my first year, I had won a MIFTA.¹ I didn’t even audition for roles in my second year – I was getting straight offers from the big director dons in the department. By the third year, I was turning down parts. ‘This acting game is easy,’ I thought. ‘This is it. People are recognising my talents. People are telling me I’m good. I’m going to be an actor. Get me back to London... This will be a doddle.’

When you begin to make this transition from education or training into the industry, then can begin the whispers of doubt: Are you ready for this? Do you have everything you need? Do you fully understand what you’re about to get into? There are so many routes into the industry and if, like me, you didn’t go to drama school, you may worry that you’re not on the right one.

Some people try to pole-vault across the void without too much forethought, buoyed by a false sense of security, excitement and sometimes cockiness, focusing on the glamour of the industry and the fruits it will inevitably bear – your name in lights, your own trailer, your face on screen! Others may bottle it altogether and give up before really giving things a chance, daunted by the uncertainty that lies ahead.

A year passed after I left uni and in that time I’d had no professional acting work. I’d had as many auditions as I have fingers... on one hand. As many rejections from those as I have fingers... on the other hand. Hundreds of email submissions to casting directors and agents had gone unanswered. A debt-inducing ‘headshot session’ made me look as if I was modelling for the WH Smith Back-to-School catalogue. I was working full time at a pizza restaurant on low wages. People told me I needed to “network”, whatever that meant. They told me I wasn’t being creative, I was out of practice. My confidence was crushed, my self-belief was in tatters. What had changed? Why didn’t anyone want me in their plays? I was a MIFTA winner!

On reflection, it was the crossing of this void when I felt in most need of professional support and informed guidance – something beyond ad-hoc and untested theories from the most well-meaning of people – and certainly something to offer some reassurance in those early, lonely days.

For the past three years, I have enjoyed working as a mentor for actors. Used as a title, ‘mentor’ can sound quite grand – it seems to imply a level of authority and status that perhaps contradicts the role as we see it today. The modern-day mentor is most commonly a volunteer, offering an act of service without financial gain. There need be no sense of status. Where a mentor remains purely an advisor, coach or guide, the engagement between mentor and mentee is a very human one, rooted in trust.

What I have learnt to be key to a successful mentor-mentee relationship is that the mentor is never ‘better’ – simply further along their career path – than the mentee. The

¹ A delightful highlight of the university of Manchester theatrical calendar and the name given to the awards presented as part of their ‘in-fringe’ festival. A bit Like an Oscar – but also absolutely nothing like an Oscar.

decision to offer advice must always be in the interests of the recipient, though chances are it will also be an enriching experience for the mentor, as I have discovered.

Before officially becoming a mentor, I'd worked as a facilitator with young actors for over 10 years across youth theatres, social inclusion courses, community projects, drama schools and universities and I'm grateful to those employers that have allowed me space to develop in this role. During this time, one young person told me how a previous mentor she had been assigned for her course had failed even to respond to her numerous requests for contact. Others challenged the quality of mentorship available across aforesaid training programmes or expressed disappointment at the lack of mentorship opportunities. Expectations had been left unmet, and there was a feeling that some mentors had assumed the role primarily as an ego-boosting exercise, leaving the mentee feeling further behind the curve than before. These dispiriting conversations with young people highlighted the void that I felt existed between education/training/youth theatre and the professional industry.

The area is currently being supported through the excellent and determined work of several individual organisations and charities who are embracing the benefits of mentorship. The National Youth Theatre's creative pathway opportunities provide free training to those members who wish to explore them. Its brilliant REP company offers one-to-one mentorship opportunities for all successful course participants. Numerous drama schools have introduced mentors to students, during and after their time studying. Arts Emergency is making an incredible difference in supporting change in this area and certainly one worth supporting if you feel mentorship might be for you. Similarly, Jerwood Arts also boasts some impressive artist development programmes & bursaries, supported by mentors tailored to the artists needs. I nod joyfully to David Mumeni's incredible Open Door programme, which offers a 'buddy-up' scheme to help support young talented people who may not have the financial support or resources to pursue drama school. These are just a few examples, but yet proof, that mentorship really does work and that it could exist on a larger scale.

Good mentorship should be used by the mentee as a tool to scout out the industry. It encourages you to be inquisitive, to ask questions and to self-manage expectations. To learn how to make contacts and correspond. The crossing of the void, with a mentor by your side, should be gentle and paced, allowing time to prepare for the reality when stepping off on the other side.

As a football fan, I look at the gruelling club academy regimes. Of young players at top academy level, fewer than 1% will end up playing in the Premier League. Clubs face criticism for the lack of aftercare for these aspirants – the 99% who fall by the wayside – some of whom have been at the clubs since they were as young as five. They are effectively being dumped in the final stages of their football education, without alternative qualifications, any form of career back-up plan and sometimes with hardly surprising mental-health problems.

Is our industry so different? A pre-pandemic study by Queen Mary University of London indicated that only 2% of actors make a living from the profession, with 90% out of work at any one time. I wonder how different my run-up to the void might have looked had I considered such realities – certainly a little less Greg Rutherford thinking he was Marlon Brando. If the least people need to understand is what awaits beyond the void,

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whose responsibility is it to inform them? Can the industry be more transparent? And how far can mentorship go?

In 2020 I founded The Ten, a free mentorship programme for ten young people aged 18–25 all looking to cross the void. I selected mentees, with a focus in particular on working with young actors from under-represented backgrounds, who I believed had the potential to work as professional actors, not only in terms of talent, but also drive, with or without a drama school training.

‘Why not start with one person and see how you get on?’ my partner quite reasonably asked me – a number of times. It was June 2020, in the thick of Covid, nothing was going on workwise and it seemed like good timing. It was a time when those hoping to enter the industry might simply turn away from it, which would have been a great shame.

Being a mentor provided insights into the sorts of struggles I experienced starting out, but also new ones – notably the practice, demands and expectations of self-taping for today’s young actors. I knew how difficult it can be, but I now see it from the perspective of those new to it.

I watched a few of my mentees struggle with the reality of the work involved when tapes are coming at you thick and fast: the expectation to learn all that material, make strong creative choices, find someone to read in with you, and find time to actually tape, edit and upload. And then have to accept that you might hear nothing back. Although it is worth referencing the free Yes/No tool that has since been rolled out by industry platform Tagmin, in collaboration with casting directors Anna Dawson and Amy Blair, which offers an option for actors to ensure they are always told when a role did not go their way. This feels to be an important step forwards in clarity and communication.

The anticipated workload, lack of acknowledgment and rejections were enough of a shock for one mentee to decide that acting was not for them. Although devastating for me to hear, considering their potential, how positive it was that they had come to their own decision at this point before a heavier toll might have been suffered. That mentee seemed totally at peace arriving at this conclusion – and with a clearer idea of what they wanted to pursue instead.

Being a mentor is not about suggesting that you’ve somehow made it (God knows, I haven’t) or that you have all the answers (I really don’t). It’s about, firstly, listening and ensuring that the mentorship is driven by the mentee’s needs. Secondly, it’s about sharing – your thoughts, experience and ideas – in the hope that your insights might align with the other person’s situation. Thirdly, it’s about managing expectations. Social media might highlight the few stars who instantly landed a lead role with a major streaming service, but that doesn’t make it the norm. The norm for an actor is an unrelated part-time job and working out how to do your tax return and going without work for months on end. For myself, another norm was becoming very well acquainted with daytime TV – a particular favourite being *Cash in the Attic*: a show that I imagine sends many an actor straight to investigate any unbeknownst loft space.

I found it important to be candid that I would offer practical and honest answers to questions, but that the answer wouldn’t necessarily be right. We also discussed being able to challenge one another without taking offence. Good communication became key when it came to respecting each other’s external personal commitments. There might be times

when we would have to work around each other's schedules and this should never be taken to mean giving up or losing interest.

What I have enjoyed most is "sharing the wealth" in terms of experience, but also at times throwing open the contacts book: 'Write to this person, invite that person, email those people'. Those contacts might blame me for all those mentees clogging up their inboxes, but it feels like the right thing to do.

You might argue that it's counter-intuitive for actors to help actors when it's such a competitive field, but why should it be? And I'd like to take it further: imagine if, once you had worked professionally for ten years as an actor, it was made compulsory to mentor an actor at the beginning of their journey. You would take an interest in their work, make introductions, find time to see their work and offer feedback. You could commit to an hour a fortnight for a year, whether in person, on the phone or on Zoom.

And what if this 'act-of-service' was subsidised by our government, so that you were paid for your time? Where would the money come from? I don't know, but I point to France, where some 250,000 artists, performers and creatives receive state stipends to help cover costs between jobs, provided they work at least 507 hours per year. We would then have a full-circle mentorship programme, which would feed our rich arts and culture sector from which our country profits in so many ways.

It's my privilege still to be acting today. I've managed it for 15 years now and I'm grateful, though I would be lying if I said I hadn't come close at times to giving it all up. It remains an industry fraught with problems and, when you consider these alongside the competition for acting jobs, one might wonder quite what the attraction is. However, it's the community that all my mentees love and of which they want to be part. It's certainly the thing I still love the most. Mentoring has given me confidence that we can strengthen our industry and our circumstances from the inside. In very few professions do we encounter as many people as we do in ours. If we're open to sharing and helping each other out and treat that as an enriching experience, maybe we'll all find ourselves that bit further along.

Mark Weinman is an actor/writer working across stage and screen. His credits include *Ant Man* and *The Wasp: Quantumania*, *I May Destroy You*, *After Life* and *Captain Amazing*. He is an associate of the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain working as a director, facilitator and writer. He is also founder of The Ten, a not-for-profit mentorship programme which also offers affordable acting coaching and opportunities to the wider community. See more at www.thetentalent.co.uk.

It's warm up north

Adelle Hulsmeier

Overcoming the stigma that suggests the North East of England offers limited opportunities to actors, both trained and un-trained, is difficult. At a time when travel and movement is significantly restricted, this article is timely in putting some of the more progressive opportunities offered in the North East of England on the map. It offers an overview of some of the exciting and progressive opportunities that are currently offered in this region, particularly Newcastle and Sunderland, hopefully helpful to today's aspirant actors when thinking about the extent of opportunities that may exist 'closer to home' or that may be worth re-locating for.

Sunderland Culture, Sunderland

Sunderland Culture, of which the Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust, the University of Sunderland and Sunderland City Council are the founding partners, is a new organisation which was created to bring together Sunderland's most important cultural assets and activities.

This cultural initiative enjoys the benefits of the National Glass Centre, the Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens, the Sunderland Empire, a 400-seat venue the Auditorium at the Fire Station, and music venue The Peacock.

The new and exciting Auditorium at the Fire Station which sits in Sunderland's Music, Arts and Cultural quarter, is the city's newest cultural venue. It offers dance classes, theatre workshops and a heritage centre. Live Theatre's Live Tales and DanceCity also operate from the venue. The Fire Station Auditorium is a versatile performance space which offers a year-round programme of live music, theatre, dance and comedy in a spectacular new state-of-the-art 550 seated or 800 standing capacity space. The auditorium provides a fantastic opportunity to bring artists, shows and performances to the city that have not been able to visit Sunderland before.

Live Theatre, Newcastle

Live Theatre has an international reputation as a new writing theatre. As well as producing and presenting new plays, there are extensive artistic opportunities for anyone looking to develop their acting skills from ages 11+.

The Elevator Programme supports the early career development of independent artists in the North East and across the UK. It incorporates writing courses and script developmental opportunities, bursaries and space for companies to develop new work.

Elevator is an annual festival which allows artists to present new theatre in Live Theatre's venue. Since 2014 Elevator has launched 25 brand new plays, worked with 17 associate artists and awarded 16 bursaries.

Every year, Live Theatre select emerging theatre artists/companies to be their associate artists, benefiting from exclusive opportunities and support such as mentoring and development time and space.

For young people Live Theatre offers the largest free youth theatre in the region, open to ages 11–25. Over 3 terms you can develop skills in stage craft, develop a new play to

perform and explore scripts that have been produced and performed at Live Theatre. Young people aged 11–25 can also join the Wordplay group to explore the world of spoken word.

Arts Award is a national accredited qualification designed to grow young people as artists and arts leaders. Live Theatre often works in partnership with organisations such as The Prince's Trust as well as its own Youth Theatre members, and Live Theatre's plays, post-show talks and workshops can support young people to achieve Arts Award. Students taking Arts Award at Live Theatre have a 100% pass rate.

Creative Careers Week offers work experience for ages 14–18. 10 students are offered experience placements where they are introduced to the creative production, development, and finance and marketing departments within Live Theatre. Students can also work as a collective to creatively devise a 10–15 minute performance throughout the week.

Volunteer roles at Live Theatre are varied and available in Live Tales (a children and young people's writing centre) and in other areas of Live Theatre's work. They include supporting and encouraging children and young people to write, illustrating their stories or leading tours of the buildings. All volunteers receive ongoing training and support, a programme of social events and some discounts at Live Theatre. There are volunteering opportunities at Live Theatre, Newcastle, and The Fire Station, Sunderland.

Project A, Newcastle Theatre Royal, Newcastle

Project A is a 1 year actor training programme, delivered from within Newcastle's Theatre Royal. Delivery takes place over 3 terms and 18 students are accepted on the programme each year. They have access to the main house auditorium, visiting professionals, studio theatre, rehearsal room and dedicated training space.

Over 90% of Project A's graduates are working professionally or gaining agent representation within 6 months of graduation.

The course is full time and students are expected to attend between 25–45 hours a week. In term 1 you develop performance skills in relation to character creation and vocal and physical development. Term 2 is delivered by associate specialists and covers areas such as business, Shakespeare, Meisner and screen. The final term is the production term which takes students into an intensive rehearsal process, culminating in a showcase performance at the Theatre Royal.

Alphabetti Theatre, Newcastle

Alphabetti is a fringe venue in Newcastle that creates, produces, and programmes original work from emerging artists in music, theatre, comedy and poetry.

While they predominantly programme original work across the performing arts, if you've got an idea that doesn't quite sit in that section, they advise you still get in touch.

Northern Stage, Newcastle

Northern Stage is the largest producing theatre company in the North East of England. Northern Stage Filmmakers is a course for 16–25 year olds in partnership with My Life Productions, Woodhorn Museum and The Heritage Lottery Fund. During the course you can learn all aspects of filmmaking, including acting, directing, writing, producing, camera, sound and editing. The group produce a 30-minute documentary and a 15-minute fictional film (based on the true stories of the documentary) premiered at Northern Stage and Alnwick Playhouse.