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[Department
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Guidance

Dance and Drama Awards guide: academic year 2025 to 2026

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Applies to England

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Introduction

The guide sets out the funding rules for the Dance and Drama Awards (DaDA) scheme and forms part of institutions' Department of Education (DfE) funding agreements. Institutions must comply with the rules and must be able to show they comply at any audit.

DfE provides the funding for the DaDA scheme. Only institutions who are DfE approved to administer the scheme can offer DaDA funding to students.

The term 'we' below refers to DfE and the term 'you' refers to DaDA institutions.

DaDA offers income assessed support for tuition fees and living costs. It is available at a number of high-quality private dance and drama institutions in England. DaDA is designed to contribute to the costs of studying for talented

young people who want to become professional actors and dancers.

Only students enrolled on the Trinity College London (TCL) level 5 and 6 Professional Diplomas in Dance, Acting and Musical Theatre are eligible for DaDA funding.

Students must be studying one of these TCL diploma courses:

- level 6 Diploma in Professional Acting (3 years)
- level 5 Diploma in Professional Acting (1 year)
- level 5 Diploma in Professional Dance (Classical Ballet or Contemporary Dance) (2 years)
- level 6 Diploma in Professional Dance (3 years)
- level 6 Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre (3 years)

Students who may also be enrolled on a higher education (HE) degree programme alongside the TCL diploma course are not permitted to access HE student support as well as being in receipt of DaDA funding.

The most important criterion in allocating DaDA funding is for institutions to identify students with the most potential to succeed in the profession based on their talent as judged at audition.

DaDA funding in academic year 2025 to 2026

Income assessment

Students starting their Trinity College London (TCL) course in academic year 2025 to 2026 have their eligibility for DaDA funding determined by the institution.

Institutions do this at audition, based on students' talent and potential to succeed in the industry.

Institutions assess the amount of financial support a student is entitled to based on nationally set income bands. Household income is used to determine the level of financial support for both fees and living costs (maintenance).

Institutions will normally use the income assessment undertaken at the beginning of the students' first academic year on the TCL diploma course to set the amount of tuition fee support for the whole of their course. However, an income assessment must be undertaken each year to establish the amount of living costs support the student is entitled to receive.

You are required to undertake income assessments for new starters (for both

tuition fees and living costs) and for students who are returning for their second and third year (for living costs only) using the [income scales](#) for academic year 2025 to 2026. Where information provided by returning students shows a change in their circumstances that has significantly increased or decreased their household income, you may wish to use their discretion to reassess them for tuition fees.

Student eligibility

Age

To be eligible to receive DaDA funding in academic year 2025 to 2026, students must be aged:

- between 16 and 23 at the start of the academic year to apply for a dance course
- between 18 and 23 at the start of the academic year to apply for an acting course

Residency

You can only give DaDA funding to students who satisfy one of the following residency conditions:

- a UK or Irish national and have lived in the UK, EEA, Gibraltar or Switzerland for at least 3 years prior to the start of the course
- a family member of a UK or Irish National, where both UK or Irish National and family member have lived in the UK, EEA, Gibraltar or Switzerland for the past 3 years
- an EU, EEA or Swiss worker, or the family member of an EU, EEA or Swiss Worker with settled or pre-settled status under the EU settlement scheme and have been living in the UK, EEA, Gibraltar or Switzerland for the past 3 years
- the child of a Turkish worker and have been living in the UK, EEA, Gibraltar or Switzerland for the past 3 years
- is recognised as a refugee by the UK government, or the spouse or civil partner or child of a refugee, granted Humanitarian Protection or indefinite leave to remain

EU, EEA and Swiss citizens must have successfully applied for the EU settlement scheme and hold either settled or pre-settled status. Irish Nationals, however, do not need to apply to the [EU settlement scheme](#).

Allocations to institutions

DaDA funding is intended to contribute towards the costs of training. It is not intended to cover all costs of the training in full.

We issue allocation letters to each institution confirming their total amount of DaDA funding in spring 2025.

You should use allocations to support continuing students already in receipt of DaDA funding and then for new students applying for the first time.

You should manage DaDA funding at your own discretion but in accordance with the criteria explained in this guide. This includes deciding whether you wish to allocate all the funding or hold a small contingency fund to respond to issues later in the year.

We have based academic year 2025 to 2026 DaDA allocations on data on student numbers and spend from the last full year (academic year 2023 to 2024). Projected numbers for academic year 2024 to 2025 have also been factored in. Each institution should be able to afford to support a similar number of students this academic year as they have done previously.

We will make allocation payments in 2 instalments; approximately two-thirds in August 2025 and the remaining one-third in April 2026.

You may use up to 5% of the total allocation of funding for administration costs.

Underspends and spending flexibility

We will reconcile any underspent funds from institutions in academic year 2025 to 2026. You cannot carry underspends forward into future years.

As in previous academic years, you may use discretion and flexibility in your allocated DaDA funding. You can do this to provide partial funding for talented students if you have insufficient funds to provide the full support that the student would have been eligible to receive.

You must ensure you communicate to students and parents how you are using this flexibility so that your use of DaDA funding is clear and transparent. You must ensure that you only give out partial funding awards after all successful students applying for DaDA have been fully assessed, and the full DaDA funding process has been completed.

Application, income assessment and payment of

DaDA funding

The most important criterion in allocating DaDA funding is that institutions identify at audition those students with the most potential to succeed in the profession based on their talent.

When auditioning students, you must implement The Code of Practice for Auditions and Interviews produced by the Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre (CDMT). You must set out the procedures students must follow to audition for a place and DaDA funding.

Provisional and final awards

You may offer provisional awards and final awards. You may offer provisional DaDA awards before a student formally accepts a place. You should not offer provisional awards to students prior to 1 March 2025.

You can only offer final DaDA awards when the student has formally accepted a place and they have received a completed DaDA application form and carried out a full income assessment.

The [DaDA application and assessment process](#) sets out the process for funding for new students. This is for information only and we recognise that processes may vary in individual institutions.

Institutions are reminded that CDMT will continue to manage the clearing process for academic year 2025 to 2026.

Applying for DaDA funding

You should use the application forms supplied by DfE when assessing the amount of DaDA funding a student is eligible to receive.

The Self-Declaration of Income form enables institutions to carry out an initial assessment of the student's household income and determine an indicative level of support they may be eligible to receive. The student should complete this form when they are offered a provisional place at the institution.

You may make provisional DaDA funding offers at this stage. Any provisional amount of DaDA funding stated by the institution to the student must be clearly explained to the student, as based on the information they supplied on the self-declaration form. You must make clear that the funding amount quoted to them is not guaranteed but is subject to verification and confirmation via the main DaDA application form.

Once a student has formally accepted their place, they must complete the main DaDA application form to determine the final amount of funding they are eligible to receive. You can only confirm funding after they have undertaken the full income assessment using the information from the main application form and appropriate supporting evidence. You must ensure that students fully understand this.

Income Assessment

Institutions use the student's household income from the previous tax year for the income assessment. For academic year 2025 to 2026, this is tax year 2024 to 2025. Income evidence can include:

- tax credit award notice
- award of benefits notice or evidence from employment (P60, P11D) or self-employment

You should also take unearned income into account such as:

- shares and investments
- savings
- pensions and
- any income from rental property

You must ensure the evidence they use in the income assessment is complete and fully covers the correct tax year.

Tuition Fees

The income assessment undertaken at the start of the student's course for tuition fees should normally last for the length of the student's course.

However, students and parents have a responsibility to report significant changes in their circumstances that may impact on the amount of DaDA funding they are eligible to receive; and institutions have discretion to reassess tuition fees, where the student can provide evidence of a significant change of circumstances.

A significant change is a change that will impact on the student's circumstances going forward and/or changes that occurred for the whole of the previous academic year. Changes include both those that significantly decrease household income and changes that significantly increase household income. Examples include divorce or relationship breakdown, changes in employment, marriage or cohabitation.

In-year reassessment of tuition fee costs should only take place in exceptional cases such as, disability or death of a parent or carer.

Institutions have further discretion to consider genuinely exceptional circumstances that significantly impact on a student's ability to participate, for example, where changes in financial circumstances mean the student would otherwise be forced to drop out of their diploma course.

All assessment decisions must be set out in auditable records, supported by evidence and affordable within an institution's budget. Additional funding will not be available.

Living Costs (maintenance)

Income assessment for funding living costs must be undertaken on an annual basis. Students must submit a new application for living costs support each academic year.

Where there is a change in income (either a reduction or an increase), you should make adjustments to the level of funding a student is entitled to each year, in line with the national income bands.

In-year reassessment of living costs support should only take place in exceptional cases, such as, disability or death of a parent or carer.

Institutions have further discretion to consider genuinely exceptional circumstances that significantly impact on a student's ability to participate, for example, where changes in financial circumstances mean the student would otherwise be forced to drop out of their diploma course.

All assessment decisions must be set out in auditable records, supported by evidence and affordable within an institution's budget. Additional funding will not be available

In-year reassessment - independent students

A student may have their fees and living costs application reassessed in-year if their circumstances change and they can provide evidence that they have become an 'independent' student.

This evidence could cover things such as:

- they are married
- they have financially supported themselves for three years or more

- they are the natural or adoptive parent of a child who lives with them
- they have no living parents
- they are estranged from their parents

An independent student reassessment is undertaken on the student's household income and that of their spouse or partner (if they have one).

Confirmation of DaDA funding

When institutions have assessed the main application and checked the evidence, they must notify students in writing to confirm the amount of tuition fees and any living costs funding they are entitled to receive.

Where a student is not offered DaDA funding, you must write to them to explain the reasons. The letter you give or send to the student should also set out details of your appeals procedure. If the student believes that the process used to come to the decision contains irregularities, you must be given the right to appeal under the institution's procedures. If the institution is found to be in error, you must compensate the student appropriately.

Payment of DaDA funding to students

You should make living costs payments directly to students once they have been fully assessed as eligible for DaDA. You are free to determine the frequency of payments to students; however, it is recommended that payments are made in instalments, for example, on a termly basis. This ensures students do not receive funding they are not entitled to, if, for example, they withdraw from their course part way through the year.

Where an institution issues a large amount of funding to a student, they should be aware that this is at their own risk. No additional funding can be claimed from DfE in the event of any overpayment to students by institutions.

You should make clear to students that continued receipt of DaDA is conditional on them meeting agreed standards set by the institutions, for example, relating to attendance, behaviour and progression.

Communications, Governance and Monitoring

You are responsible for ensuring that information about DaDA is available to

students through their literature and websites and that this information is up to date. We will regularly review and update our [information for students](#) and institution focused information on GOV.UK.

Management Information returns (MI)

In June 2026, you must complete and submit an end of year MI data return for academic year 2025 to 2026 to support the monitoring of the DaDA scheme.

Audit and scheme protection

Administration and allocation of DaDA is subject to DfE's audit process. For audit purposes, and to provide accurate MI, you should maintain accurate and up to date records of students and funding. This includes recording students in receipt of DaDA on the budget management spreadsheet for academic year 2025 to 2026.

You must comply with all aspects of the information on GOV.UK, with Health and Safety, Equal Opportunities and any other legal requirements applying to the institution. We may withdraw DaDA funding at any time if this is not done or if you cannot provide sufficient evidence that it is financially viable.

You will be subject to governance and audit regimes that include the requirement for Ofsted inspections and the publication of inspection reports. You must permit any person authorised by Ofsted to inspect them. You must provide any such person with all the facilities you may reasonably require for making an inspection as and when required, in line with Ofsted powers of entry and access to documents and its education inspection framework in accordance with section 131 and 132 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Only institutions whose provision is assessed as outstanding (grade 1) or good (grade 2) at Ofsted inspection will be eligible to offer DaDA funding. We will stop funding institutions if you do not maintain their levels of quality unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Ofsted inspections are undertaken in line with the Education Inspection Framework and other guidance current at that time. The [education inspection framework](#) and the [handbook for inspections](#) can be viewed on the GOV.UK website. All inspection reports are published.

You should ensure you are fulfilling your responsibilities for safeguarding all students. You should also ensure you are aware of the government's [Prevent duty](#) guidance about safeguarding young people from extremism and radicalisation.

We may also withdraw DaDA funding where the institution ceases to meet the requirements of the DaDA scheme, for example:

- it is no longer validated by Trinity College London as eligible to offer level 5 and 6 Diploma qualifications
- it is no longer able to maintain levels of quality, relevance to employers’ needs and the standards of performance that are currently set for the DaDA scheme.

In the event that an institution closes, students can move to another institution with DaDA funding with prior DfE agreement. In these circumstances, we will fund the remaining period of the student’s support at the new institution but only at the fee rate that applied at the closing institution.

Further information

Current or new students should read our [information for students](#) which we review on a regular basis.

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