

## The Dance and Drama Awards funding scheme: Successes and Challenges



### 1. An introduction to the Dance and Drama Awards (DaDAs)

First introduced in 1999, the Dance and Drama Awards (DaDAs) offer annual grants to exceptionally talented performing arts students who have the potential to succeed in the industry, and aspire to study at some of the country's leading providers of professional vocational training in dance, drama and musical theatre. DaDAs offer reduced tuition fees and assistance with living costs for the duration of the course and are supported through the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Leading exponents of the dance, drama and musical theatre sector consider the DaDAs a critical influence on the development of the performing arts in the United Kingdom (UK). Programmes of study which attract DaDA funding have been specifically designed by employers and educationists to meet the needs of the performing arts industry.

DaDA funding is reserved for students studying a Trinity College London Professional Performing Arts Diploma at one of seventeen approved specialist providers. These courses involve more than 30 contact teaching hours a week, totaling over 900 tutor-led hours per year. This rigorous and demanding training is the reason that vocational training at DaDA providers is a genuine route into successful employment in the industry.

### 2. The history of DaDA funding

Prior to 1999, funding decisions were made by local authorities in response to applications from would-be students living in their areas. Some authorities made funds available, others offered no financial assistance, and the prospect of a professional career could depend entirely on where one lived. The alternative to the limited amount of local authority funding on offer was for students to meet the cost of training, accommodation and subsistence themselves. Over a three year period this could amount to anything between £50,000 to £70,000, and often more by today's standards. The consequence was that only those who lived in the 'right' county or who were in a position to pay privately were able to train. The UK performing arts industry suffered as a result.

Since their introduction in 1999, the DaDAs have enabled thousands of the country's most talented young actors, dancers and musical theatre artists to access the highest standards of professional vocational training and education in the performing arts. DaDA students encompass a wide-range of cultural, socio-economic and ability backgrounds, and undertake a programme of rigorous, intensive and highly specialised study in learning environments where the sole focus is on the excellence of professional achievement in the performing arts.

A sustained policy of DaDA funding has led to more than twenty years of unparalleled success in the training of future arts professionals for the industry.

### 3. Eligibility criteria and applications for DaDA funding

DaDAs are means-tested and therefore broaden the availability of high-quality training for individuals who come from low-income families. The funding is offered at select providers and, as already referenced, can only be accessed by students studying towards a Trinity Diploma in Professional Acting, Dance and Musical Theatre at Levels 5 and 6 of Ofqual's Regulated Qualifications Framework. To be eligible for DaDA funding applicants must be aged between 16 and 23 at the start of a Dance and Musical Theatre programme or aged 18 to 23 for Acting.

Students wishing to access a DaDA are required to audition for a place on an eligible course. Following audition, those who are considered the most talented and likely to succeed in the industry are invited to apply for means-tested DaDA support towards fees and living costs, directly through the provider.

### 4. Why DaDA? The differences between DaDAs and traditional student funding routes

The DaDAs are a unique tool in promoting access to high quality vocational training for young people from low income households. The key distinction for students considering the affordability of training is that the funding is a grant and not a loan. For low income families concerned about accumulating debt, DaDAs offer a practical, reasonable alternative to Student Loans, and make the difference between being able to take up training or not.

Providers that are selected to take part in the scheme give access to talented young people from all backgrounds, assisting providers to play a full part in improving the representation of people from low income families in the performing arts.

### 5. The success of the DaDA scheme

Exceptionally talented students train with some of the finest practitioners in the UK through the scheme, entering the professional performance world with the necessary skills to succeed. Many young people and current professionals would not have been able to pursue their studies had they not been supported by DaDA funding. Below is an example of a graduate from The Oxford School of Drama.

**Cassie Bradley** attended the 3 year acting course supported by DaDA and graduated in 2013. She has had a successful career as an actor on the stage, in film and TV and on radio. She has worked with Sam Mendes and Marianne Elliott at the **National Theatre** and in the last two years has been seen in a featured role on ITV's **McDonald and Dobbs** and as Mary Magdalene in **Jesus: His Life** on Amazon Prime, among other film and TV work.

Cassie has this to say about the importance of the DaDA scheme:

*'Coming from a single parent, working class background I had no connections to the acting industry, I just knew I wanted to act. I would never have been able to afford drama school training without a Government Dance & Drama Award (DaDA) and The Oxford School of Drama had a fantastic level of support available, even at application level. Their ethos is that training should be accessible to all and that was evident from the very first audition.'*

Cassie has also been involved in campaigning for greater diversity and representation for working class actors in the industry. She has this to say about broadening diversity in training:

*'I think it's essential to our culture and the way our stories are told. In recent years there have been many positive steps towards greater representation in the arts, but there's still a long way to go. Diversity includes class and unless we fight to protect government arts funding schemes like the DaDA, and council-run drama programmes, opportunities for young people will disappear.'*

*'For me it's about challenging unspoken value systems. I'm not a politician, but I've lived it. I know I'm very lucky to have had the opportunities and breaks that I have but I don't want to be an exception. I believe the people and voices in our stories (on TV, in film, on stage and on the radio) set a precedent and should reflect the people who listen and watch them.'*

Cassie is among numerous success stories of DaDA recipients over the past twenty years, and it is important now more than ever to recognise the impact and significance of the scheme, and its capacity to diversify and strengthen the professional training offer in the UK performing arts.

## 6. What are some of the challenges faced by DaDA providers and recipients?

Whilst the success of the DaDA scheme is obvious, naturally, challenges still remain for recipients and providers of funding. Presently, there are three main areas of concern for **recipients**:

- **The scale of support for living costs.** For students with an annual household income of £21,000 or less, course fees are covered by the DaDA scheme. Students that move away from home to take up specialist vocational training must also find funds for rent, utilities, food and transport as an absolute minimum. A conservative estimate for living costs for each year of training in the UK is £9,000, however, the maximum amount available to a DaDA funded student, in terms of annual maintenance, is £4,550. This means that students from low income families must find £4,500 each year just to afford to undertake training, and many are forced to take up part-time employment which is especially demanding given the rigour of vocational conservatoire courses and the contact hours involved.
- **Maintenance support is only available to students who have a household income of £30,000 or less.** Therefore, families on household incomes of only £30,000 and over have to cover all of the accommodation and subsistence costs, which entails finding at least £9,000 a year. Students from lower income families studying at mainstream universities are automatically considered for maintenance support in the form of a loan, as well as course fees, and it is this maintenance provision that is often overlooked in discussions about strengthening DaDA funding. For some, the lack of maintenance support through the DaDA scheme means that they will not even consider training on a DaDA funded course, taking a Higher Education route instead (funded through student loans). This can be detrimental to talented young performers wishing to train for a professional performance career.
- **The upper age limit of 23** means that many older students (especially for drama) who would be eligible, because of their household income, cannot access support for course fees or living

costs. They may have been independent from their families for some time, often working in low income jobs, which have limited opportunities for accumulating savings. For such students, DaDA is likely to be their first attempt to enter further or higher education, and the inability to access the scheme will for most mean that they cannot accept a place to train.

The main challenge for **providers** is the level of funding administered to them per student annually, which can vary across organisations. The amount given remains unchanged for many years and has not increased in line with inflation. This allocation to providers does not cover the actual cost of vocational training since all students receive a minimum of 30 tutor-led hours of training each per week, amounting to more than 900 tutor-led hours of study annually. The shortfall in funding, combined with several years of inflationary increases to teacher salaries, pensions and other training costs, render some providers unable to pay market rates for expert staff, which ultimately means that they can only afford to have a limited number of students supported through the DaDA scheme on courses.

## 7. Next steps

It is recommended that the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Performing Arts Education and Training makes representations to the appropriate Ministers to advocate for the following areas of support for the DaDA scheme:

- **To increase the maintenance available to students of low income families and consider making available a loan-based option to support living costs for DaDA students.** This would bring DaDA funding maintenance support in line with traditional HE funding routes, and assist students from all backgrounds in their journey to professional performing arts training, regardless of their economic background.
- **To increase the DaDA fee rate for providers.** Providers need recognition that this rate has not changed for many years, however costs have continued to rise over the same period. An increase to this fee would enable training providers to offer more DaDA assisted places.
- **To review the age eligibility for DaDA funding and consider increasing the upper age limit at the start of the course to 26 years old.** This would allow more flexibility for potential students to enter professional vocational training settings, and support the Government's plans for enhancing life-long learning.