

Tips for being trans inclusive in the audition process

Please note - in this document, 'actor' is used as a gender-neutral term.

Thanks so much for taking the time to read this document, put together by the Cambridge Trans Theatre Collective, which is primarily aimed towards anyone putting on or casting a show. Hopefully the information below will be useful in ensuring that your audition process is more inclusive and in shedding some light on the common issues trans performers face within the Cambridge theatre scene. It might also be useful for anyone involved in theatre to read, to get an idea of these issues - for example, the more actors that state their pronouns and talk to casting panels about what roles they would be comfortable playing, the more normalised these things become! We can't claim this is an exhaustive list but, being a group of trans thespians ourselves, we hope to have covered the main issues.

PRE AUDITION

audition packs & thinking about your show with trans people in mind

1. Say what you mean!

It's pretty common in Cambridge to see parts advertised as 'm/nb' or 'f/nb'. Whilst we really appreciate your efforts to accommodate nonbinary people in your audition packs, this language isn't actually as inclusive as it appears. It tries to force nonbinary actors into the gender binary and it can be confusing to navigate or understand what is actually meant by it.

Although there's no exact solution, it would be better if you just listed the gender of the character, and let individual actors decide what parts they would feel comfortable and capable of playing.

2. Be clear with your expectations

In this vein, if it's for some reason very important that a specific character 'pass' as a specific gender, or if it's important for them to be very masculine or very feminine, put this in the audition pack so that a more informed decision can be made by the actor.

It would also be really great if you gave thought to whether certain characters could be rewritten with different pronouns. We understand that sometimes in licensed productions this can be a legal issue, and for some characters it's important that they are a certain gender or use the pronouns that are present in the script - we're not going to get angry if pronouns can't be changed for a valid reason! However, it's really good to know in advance if this is the case, again so trans actors can make an informed decision before they audition.

3. Be mindful of the language you use and of making judgements

This is mostly common sense, but avoid using gendered language (such as ‘male voices’ when you could just use more specific language such as ‘tenor’ or ‘bass’) that assumes people of a certain gender look, act or sound a certain way. Whilst there are plenty of cis people who are gender non-conforming too, being mindful of this is especially beneficial to trans people. It is also important to be open minded and anticipate that you may get people auditioning who may not fit the original image of a character or gender that you had in your head - if you’ve provided ample information, trust that the actor has taken it in, made an informed decision and is auditioning for a part that they are capable of playing!

4. For specifically trans roles

If your show has a role that is specifically for a trans actor, make sure you are clear in the audition pack what is expected of them. For example, if the (presumably trans) character is misgendered or subject to transphobia in the script, or at any point forced to conform to the gender they were assigned at birth, make sure you include this information. This is just an extension of content warnings, really, and just like content warnings means an actor can decide if being a part of that show would be unhealthy for them.

With trans roles, it’s also worth considering whether any trans person could play this role, or whether it would be more appropriate for specifically a transfeminine, transmasculine, or nonbinary person to play it. If the latter is the case, think about how you can make this clear in a respectful way. It’s easy to indicate in audition packs, but what if you don’t get anyone auditioning for that part? How will you try to fill the role without putting a burden on trans performers?

Finally, it’s also obviously very important that you give thought to how you can make a trans actor feel comfortable within the cast and production. If you’re a cis director, it could be worth adding a welfare contact to the production team who is trans, or being clear that you’ll listen to the trans actor’s thoughts and opinions.

IN THE AUDITION

creating a welcoming & open environment

1. Always ask for pronouns and check in with the actor

Asking for pronouns is pretty standard now, which is great! It can also be good to check in with the actor more explicitly to see what sort of parts they would be comfortable playing. This is particularly the case if you want them to read a different extract or are considering casting them in a different part to the one they auditioned for, as before you do either of these things it’s

best to check that you're not putting the actor in a position they're uncomfortable in. This is a tip that can help all actors feel more comfortable, but can be particularly relevant for trans actors!

2. Be open to discussion

Again, this can be useful to bear in mind for any actor, but questions trans actors have for you might be things you hadn't thought about, such as changing a character's pronouns or gender, or to do with how you envisage a certain character presenting. Hopefully having read this document, these will be things you're bearing in mind, but just be open to discussing them!

3. Don't token cast, or just cast when you have to

Really this issue regards any time a part calls for a minority to be cast, but here we'll look at it from a specifically trans perspective. If you have a trans (and this includes nonbinary!) part in your show, there are a few things to think about, some of which are discussed above.

At the audition stage, think about whether you're open to casting trans people in parts other than the trans role. The answer to this should of course be yes. Not every trans person just wants to play trans roles, and nor should they be limited to this. It's fair enough that you might not have many trans actors audition (or not know how many have auditioned!), but just because one does audition doesn't mean you should only consider them for the trans role, unless they've made it clear this is the only role they want to be considered for. If the only trans person in your production is playing a trans role, sometimes this can feel like you've only cast them because you had to. Obviously this is not usually the case - and for smaller productions it rarely seems this way - but it's something to be aware of as a director, as inbuilt bias can and does affect the way you cast a production.

4. Be conscious of opportunities and experience

There are many reasons why trans actors may have had less acting opportunities than other actors - as just one example, there may be nonbinary actors who only feel comfortable playing nonbinary roles and therefore have had rather limited opportunities. Be mindful of this when casting. A lack of experience might mean that some trans actors are not as 'good' at the audition process as others, even though they have the same potential.