

MENTAL HEALTH POLICY & GUIDELINES FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

Introduction

As a leading international conservatoire, RCM aims to provide musical education and professional training at the highest international level to meet the aspirations of as many as possible of those who have the ability and motivation to benefit. Students are recruited on the basis of their musical abilities and potential. The RCM aims to provide a positive and supportive environment, free from stigmatisation and discrimination, which enables students with mental health needs to thrive and fulfil their potential.

This policy sets out the RCM position with regard to students experiencing mental health difficulties and aims to help any member of RCM staff who may have concerns about a student by:

- Suggesting possible indicators of mental distress
- Providing guidance on how to respond to students in line with RCM procedures
- Outlining measures that can be put in place to support students with mental health issues
- Providing guidance about interruption of study and fitness to return to study

Staff are expected to:

- Exercise duty of care when dealing with students
- Acknowledge the boundaries of their roles, knowing where, when and how to refer students on
- Ensure that appropriate reasonable adjustments are carried out in accordance with individual Learning Support Agreements
- Abide by confidentiality and data protection policies, and exercise responsibility regarding disclosure
- Promote a learning environment free from prejudice about mental health issues

Students are expected to:

- Seek help if they have mental health difficulties, and use the appropriate internal and/or external support services
- Acknowledge their boundaries when supporting friends and encourage them to seek appropriate support
- Abide by the General Regulations for Students
- Help to promote a learning environment free from prejudice about mental health

Common signs and symptoms that may be indicative of mental distress:

- Loss of concentration and motivation
- Decline in self-care – personal hygiene, dress etc
- Repeatedly cancelling/postponing lessons at short notice without adequate reason
- Anxiety
- Sleep disturbance/insomnia
- Appetite disturbance – weight loss/weight gain
- Low mood/listlessness
- Social withdrawal
- Reliance on alcohol/drugs
- Ideas of self-harm (actual self-harm may be concealed e.g. by wearing long sleeves at all times) and suicide/death
- Apparent obsessive behaviour e.g. frequent handwashing, repetitive touching or checking, 'ritualised' behaviour
- Noticeable changes in usual outlook and demeanour that are not attributable to particular events

Less common signs and symptoms:

- Delusions

- Disordered thoughts
- Disconnection from reality
- Excessive self-confidence and elation (appearing 'high')
- Sexually risky behaviour.

NB: It must be remembered that some signs may be attributable to other causes, such as money worries or accommodation problems, for which students should be encouraged to seek advice from Student Services. Whether a member of staff is responding to information given directly by a student, to signs or symptoms they have observed or to concerns expressed by a third party, such as another student, it is crucial to be aware of personal and professional boundaries when offering support. Do not hesitate to refer on or seek advice. If a member of staff feels distressed by a crisis situation or by providing support for a student with mental health difficulties, they can seek support for themselves via Confidential Care, the Employee Assistance Programme for RCM staff. See the MUSE HR pages - Health and Wellbeing/Employee Assistance Programme. Staff can access advice and information on the [Supporting Our Students Staff Hub](#) on Learn about mental health issues, inclusive teaching, Learning Support Agreements, how to respond to concerns and how to seek support for themselves.

Supporting students with mental health issues

1. Applicants to RCM are invited to tell us about a disability or health issue, including mental health conditions. This not only gives the opportunity for reasonable adjustments to be made at audition but also enables an early dialogue to be started with successful applicants about appropriate support for their studies. The RCM will make adjustments that are deemed to be reasonable, in line with the Equality Act 2010, ensuring that students are appropriately supported whilst maintaining the integrity of their learning experience. If an applicant or student discloses a particular diagnosed mental health condition, assumptions should not be made about how this might present or their ability to pursue their studies.
2. Once enrolled, the student will be invited by the Disability Advisor to set up a Learning Support Agreement which will detail the student's learning support requirements and agreed reasonable adjustments. This document will then be shared, with the student's consent, with relevant RCM staff so the support can be put in place.
3. Each individual will vary in the pattern and impact of their particular health issue, so there are no routine adjustments. However, due to the fluctuating nature of mental health conditions, it may be helpful for the individual to be permitted to submit work late (within an agreed timeframe) without penalty, for example. This adjustment will also help to reduce anxiety and remove the need for the student to negotiate at a time when they are feeling particularly unwell.
4. Other reasonable adjustments may include, but are not necessarily limited to, individual arrangements for recitals e.g. no members of the public to be present, or alternative methods of assessment to be determined in conjunction with the relevant Programme/Module Lead. If a student has been assigned a mental health professional or social worker, then, subject to the student's consent, Student Services will work with them in supporting the student.
5. Some students may choose not to disclose mental health issues prior to enrolling, for a number of reasons, which may include fear of discrimination and stigmatisation. There may also be students who become unwell during their studies. While the majority of students with mental health issues will be able to manage their conditions perfectly well with appropriate specialist support, there may be times when the symptoms of the illness impact on their day to day wellbeing and ability to study. This may be the first indication that a student, who has not previously disclosed a mental health issue, is unwell. The pattern of teaching at RCM, with its focus on one to one principal study lessons, and the nature of the relationship between student and teacher, mean that professorial staff are well placed to notice signs and symptoms which may indicate underlying or emerging mental health issues.

RCM Counselling Service

6. The RCM Counselling Service is located within Student Services, and the three counsellors provide the equivalent of five days of support per week, during term time. This is an appointment-based service, with no scope for emergency intervention, although exceptionally, one of the Counsellor's advice may be sought, if available. The service is well used throughout the year, and there may occasionally be the need for a waiting list. A student will normally be offered up to six sessions of counselling. Where a Counsellor assesses that an individual student requires longer term therapy, psychiatric or psychological assessment, they will work with the student to refer them to an appropriate external source of support. This may include, but is not limited to, the Imperial College Health Centre. Students may also refer themselves for counselling at the Imperial College Health Centre, first seeking an initial appointment with one of the GPs.

Responding to disclosures/concerns and fitness to study

Confidentiality and disclosure

- Do not disclose personal or sensitive information about students to other students or to any RCM staff members who do not need to know or anyone outside the College, including parents, without the student's explicit consent (unless there are serious concerns for the safety of the student or others)
- If the parents (or others) wish to contact a student, you can offer to tell the student they have been in touch and request them to contact the parent(s).
- If it is necessary to disclose information without the student's consent (i.e. if there are serious concerns for their safety or the safety of others), tell the student of your decision and your reasons for doing so (unless this in itself would risk or prompt harm). Treat personal information about students with discretion.
- Only disclose the minimum information necessary
- Only disclose to those who need to know
- Document any decision to disclose without consent and your reasons for doing so

Do not promise absolute confidentiality and advise the student that you may have to consult a colleague

7. Please see the [RCM Policy on the General Data Protection Regulations](#)
8. It should be noted in particular, that if a student shares details of a disability (including a mental health issue) with any member of staff, then the College is deemed to know, and there is a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to enable the student to manage their studies. Wherever possible, students disclosing a mental health issue should be encouraged to consent to share this information in a confidential setting with the Disability Advisor or Student Services Manager. If they insist on complete confidentiality with you, explain in advance that it may not be possible to make all the support arrangements needed, and that if you are worried about their safety or the safety of others, you cannot undertake to keep this information to yourself.
9. At any level of concern, you can call on one of the RCM's trained Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs). The list of Mental Health First Aiders is posted on the RCM Human Resources webpage and learn, and you can also call RCM Facilities ext. 4315 (020 7591 4315) and ask them to contact a MHFA for you.
10. Consider your own health and well-being. Whatever the severity of an individual's mental health difficulties it can be challenging, overwhelming or upsetting to confront, especially if you have underlying mental health issues, whether diagnosed or not, of your own. In addition to seeking support from your line manager, staff can also access free and confidential emotional support via [CiC Confidential Care](#). See the RCM Muse Human Resources page for [login details and more information](#).

How do you decide whether or not a student is in imminent danger?

11. It is important to try and decide whether or not a student is in imminent danger, but it is always better to err on the side of caution if you are unsure. It may be very clear from the individual's presentation, for example if they appear volatile, frightened or seemingly disconnected from reality, that urgent help is required. If they have suicidal thoughts and have a plan i.e. they have decided how they will carry out their intentions, immediate referral to emergency medical services must be made. Call RCM Facilities on ext. 4315 (020 7591 4315) to enlist their support and to request a 999 call. You can also contact (or ask RCM Facilities to contact) a Mental Health First Aider, the Student Services Manager or the Directorate Office.

Levels of concern – how to respond

| Level 1 – Initial concerns | Level 2 – Growing concerns | Level 3 – Imminent risk |
|---|---|---|
| A student tells you directly that they are experiencing mental health difficulties and you think there is no immediate risk of harm to themselves or others | There are accumulating concerns about the student's mental health and the student's presentation suggests that if the situation is not addressed promptly, they may be in danger of harming themselves or others and/or their studies may be at risk. | The student's presentation/actions suggest imminent danger to themselves or others (for example, they appear disconnected from reality, they have indicated they intend to harm themselves or others, or there is sufficient reason to believe they have already acted to harm themselves.. |
| <p>Response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen carefully and respectfully • Reassure the student that you will keep what they say confidential, but that you cannot do so if you feel that they or someone else is at risk. • Be supportive, but clear about the limits of that support. You can seek advice from a Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) by calling ext. 4315 (020 7591 4315) or the Student Services Manager (020 7591 4316). • Signpost the student to the Disability Advisor to discuss any learning support needs (or refer them with their consent). • Encourage the student to seek help from their GP if they have not already done so. • Advise the student they can access support from Student Services, including RCM counselling. • Signpost the student to Togetherall, an online resource providing confidential, 24/7 support. • If in doubt, seek advice from Student Services. <p>If the student declines to seek help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the situation. • Alert the Student Services Manager and your Head of Faculty or Programme Lead. • If possible, make a record of the conversation and ask the student to sign it. If they refuse, record your concerns. | <p>Response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alert the Student Services Manager and the Head of Faculty or appropriate Programme Lead about your concerns. • If needed, enlist assistance from a Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) by contacting RCM Facilities on ext. 4315 (020 7591 4315) • If no-one is available, RCM Facilities can send a member of their team to support you. • Offer to contact Imperial College Health Centre to arrange for an urgent appointment. Call 020 7584 6301 and explain that the situation is urgent and that you need to speak to the Duty Doctor. <p>NB: At this level, the Student Services Manager will use the Student Services Risk Assessment (see Appendix) and may contact the student directly, check their attendance/engagement records (if there are concerns with this), write to their GP (with their consent) and/or liaise with Prince Consort Village (if the student is a resident) to request welfare checks. It may also be appropriate for a Working Group to be convened for a case conference, chaired by the Deputy Director or Director of Programmes.</p> | <p>Response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try and stay calm. • Ensure your safety and that of the student and others. • If possible, try to reassure the student and keep them calm, preferably away from onlookers, being mindful that they may be feeling very vulnerable, frightened and/or confused. • Alert RCM Facilities on ext. 4315 (020 7591 4315). Ask them to enlist a MHFA and a member of the Facilities team to support you. • The member of the Facilities team will call 999 and will remain with the student until emergency services arrive* • Reassure other students, referring them to Student Services if they have been affected by the incident. Do not discuss the individual student's situation. • At the earliest opportunity (during office hours) inform the Student Services Manager of the incident (020 7591 4316) or, if not available, the Directorate Office (020 7591 4363). The Student Services Manager or Directorate Office can arrange for the students' trusted emergency contact to be contacted, if appropriate. • Write a report of the incident and forward to the Student Services Manager and Deputy Director at the earliest opportunity. |

* The police have powers under the 1983 Mental Health Act (Amended 2007) to remove someone thought to be suffering from a mental illness from a public place to a place of safety for assessment.

If a student reports concerns about another student

- Listen carefully and respectfully to what they are telling you
- Ask if they will consent for you to use the information they give, and ascertain whether they would like to remain anonymous in the process
- Explain that if you think the student is at risk or a risk to others you may need to seek advice, and may need to break confidentiality
- Reassure the student that they have done the right thing and remind them that they are not responsible for the student in question, although they can continue to be supportive
- Encourage the student to seek support for themselves via Student Services/RCM Counselling
- Seek advice from the Student Services Manager
- Alert the Student Services Manager, your Head of Faculty or appropriate Programme Lead

Interruption of studies and fitness to return to study

12. Occasionally a student with ill health, including mental ill health, will interrupt their studies for a period of time, pending recovery. The maximum period of interruption normally granted by the College is one year. Where, in exceptional circumstances, a longer period is required, the situation will be reviewed at least annually and no individual undertaking will be given by the College for a period of more than a year. Interruption is normally only permitted at the end of a term or year, but circumstances may dictate the timing.
13. The decision as to whether a re-entry examination is required rests with the relevant Programme Lead or Director of Programmes. In practice, the College usually requires a re-entry examination on the principal study instrument for all students permitted to interrupt for a period of more than two terms. The examination will use the same criteria as the most recently completed examination. The purpose of the re-entry examination is to ensure that a student's playing standard has not deteriorated sufficiently to compromise their likely success on the course. The examination seeks to confirm that the student is still capable of achieving a pass mark at the level previously completed.
14. It is in the student's best interests to re-commence study at a level equivalent at least to that before their interruption. For this reason, any student achieving a mark more than 10 percentage points below their previous mark will be counselled as to whether immediate re-entry is the most appropriate course of action. A student who fails to achieve a pass mark at a re-entry examination will not normally be re-admitted. A student in this situation may apply to be re-assessed at an early date (an additional fee is chargeable) and must at this re-assessment achieve a pass mark to be admitted.
15. Prior to resuming studies, the RCM will routinely request that the student undertakes a fitness to study medical assessment by the Imperial College Health Centre or by an alternative medical practitioner. If use of an alternative medical practitioner is proposed, approval needs to be sought in advance. The conditions of interruption and return to study are set out in a letter to the student from the Academic Registrar.

International students

16. International students who are subject to visa regulations and who interrupt their studies will be obliged to leave the UK during their period of interruption. In order to comply with the terms of the Sponsor Licence, the RCM is required to stop acting as the student's sponsor during a period of interruption and is obliged to report to the UK Border Agency that the student has ceased or interrupted his/her studies within 10 days of them doing so.

Student Services Manager

Nicola Smith, July 2025

Appendix 1: Policy on students of concern – student health and wellbeing

Introduction

1. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for and prioritise their physical and mental wellbeing, and pursue their studies in a community which promotes equity, inclusion, belonging and mutual respect. However, there may be occasions when a student's presentation or actions give cause for concern about their health or wellbeing and interventions by the RCM will need to be made in the interest of the safety and wellbeing of the individual, the wider college community and society.

Policy

2. Where a member of the College is concerned about the health and wellbeing of a student, the Student Services Manager or Director of Programmes will convene a Working Group on Student Health & Wellbeing for a case conference to consider the individual case. The Group comprises of:

- the Deputy Director and/or Director of Programmes (as Chair)
- the Student Services Manager
- the relevant Head of Faculty and/or Head of Programme.

The Group may call upon any of the following in an advisory capacity: RCM Counsellor, Disability Advisor, Academic Registrar, Personal Advisor or Principal Study Professor.

Members of the Working Group may be called for case conferences at short notice and not all members will need to be available for a decision or recommendation to be formed. The Working Group will consider the individual circumstances presented and follow a risk assessment process to inform any decisions.

3. In the interim, or prior to convening the Working Group, the Student Services Manager will use the Student Services Risk Assessment (see Appendix) and may attempt to contact the student directly, check their attendance/engagement records (if there are concerns about absences or lack of communication), write to their GP (with the student's consent) and/or liaise with Prince Consort Village (if the student is a resident) to request welfare checks.
4. Information held by the Student Services Department (including the RCM Counselling service) may be shared on a strictly need-to-know basis with the members of the Working Group if this is relevant and appropriate to the purposes of the case conference and the decision-making process. This may include information about whether a student has accessed counselling or other support from Student Services and/or any relevant information relating to a student's Learning Support Agreement.
5. The Working Group will generally consider the following range of actions:
 - pursue no further action;
 - communication with the student's nominated trusted emergency contact;
 - advise the student to seek professional help voluntarily, whether from an RCM Counsellor, from Imperial College Health Centre/their GP or another agency;
 - require the student to be assessed by Imperial College Health Centre, or another appropriate medical practitioner which has been approved by ICHC;
 - contact with the Imperial College Health Centre/the student's GP or another appropriate medical professional and/or an NHS Mental Health Crisis line to escalate concerns or seek guidance;
 - communication with the Manager/appropriate personnel at Prince Consort Village, if the student resides there, to request welfare checks and raise awareness of any risk concerns, in line with the Data Sharing Agreement

between Campus Living Villages and the College;

- where there is reason to believe that the student's state of health makes them unable to pursue their studies, or may cause disruption or serious concern to other members of the RCM community, or has the potential to cause harm to themselves or others, the Group may require the student to take a leave of absence or interrupt studies.
 - if necessary, the Group may recommend that the student be suspended, as a precautionary measure, or pending disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct.
6. A combination of these actions may be applied, possibly at different stages, in dealing with any individual case. Equally the Working Group will not be bound by these options if the circumstances suggest a different approach may be more appropriate to the circumstances. In all cases, the aim is to address the situation promptly, acting in the student's best interests, to prevent any further deterioration, or further negative consequences.
 7. Any decision to suspend the student or require a student to interrupt their studies must be agreed by at least two members of the RCM Directorate.
 8. Following any break in studies for reasons related to health and wellbeing, a student will normally be required to attend a fitness to study assessment with Imperial College Health Centre (IHC). The Working Group will take the recommendations of IHC into account when considering resumption of studies.
 9. If such an assessment confirms that it is not in the interests of the student or the College that the student should continue their programme of study, the Working Group may recommend continuation of interruption or suspension until they are fit to continue studies. If the student will exceed the maximum period for normal completion of the programme, the student will normally be required to withdraw.
 10. A student who refuses to undergo an appropriate medical assessment may be suspended until such time as a medical practitioner acceptable both to the student and the College has assessed the student and confirmed in writing that the student is fit to resume study.
 11. A student who is suspended, required to interrupt or is subject to any other restriction on their studies has a right to appeal to a Student Disciplinary Committee, following the procedure in the Student Code of Conduct. A student may not appeal using grounds that contest the medical assessment on which a decision is based. The student may, however, request that a second medical assessment be obtained from a medical practitioner approved by Imperial College Health Service.

Health & Wellbeing risk assessment

Key:

SSM = Student Services Manager

ICHC = Imperial College Health Centre

PCV = Prince Consort Village

| Low risk | Medium risk | High risk | Very High risk |
|--|--|---|--|
| May be of concern but situation unlikely to cause physical harm to student or others, or immediate risk to studies. May not need external involvement/action. | Growing concerns about personal safety/safety of others and/or risk to studies. May require external involvement. | Serious concerns of potential risk to self and/or studies. Could become very risky if actions are not taken. Student may not be contactable or is not responding to communications from the College. May require external involvement. | High risk of severe (potentially lethal) harm to self or others. Extremely concerning behaviour. Student may not be consenting or agreeing to supportive action. Likely to require emergency services. |
| May not be necessary to convene Working Group | May not be necessary to convene Working Group, but alert Chair | Working Group to convene | Working Group to convene |
| Possible actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check attendance/engagement • Signpost student to GP/ICHC • SSM to write to GP/ICHC requesting appointment (with student consent) • Signpost student to RCM Counselling • Signpost student to other support agencies/platforms • If appropriate, the student may be invited to discuss a Learning Support Agreement with the SSM or Disability Advisor • Actions to be logged | Possible actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check attendance/engagement • SSM to write to GP/ICHC requesting urgent appointment (with student consent) • Signpost student to other support agencies • Communication with the Manager at PCV, if the student resides there • Agree safety plan with student, if possible • SSM to log case note • Actions to be logged | Possible actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check attendance/engagement • Student may be required to take LoA or interruption • Communication with nominated trusted emergency contact • Communication with the Manager at PCV, if the student resides there • Communication with ICHC, Crisis Line or another approved agency if necessary • Agree safety plan with student, if possible • SSM to log case note • Actions to be logged | Possible actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call Emergency Services • Communication with nominated trusted emergency contact • Communication with the Manager at PCV, if the student resides there • Student may be required to take LoA or interruption • SSM to log case note • Actions to be logged |
| Agreed actions to be carried out within 1 week | Agreed actions must be carried out within 72 hours | Agreed actions must be carried out within 48 hours | Agreed actions must be carried out before end of working day. |