

ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC

PHYSICAL CONTACT IN TEACHING

Introduction

There are occasions when it may be entirely appropriate and beneficial for members of staff to have physical contact with students, but it is crucial that any such contact is appropriate and is underpinned by the informed and ongoing consent of the student and a safe teaching environment.

This guidance does not aim to discourage appropriate physical contact as a pedagogical tool but sets out the College's protocols for physical contact in teaching and physical intimacy in performance and associated rehearsals to enable those involved in the process to practice physical contact safely, consensually and effectively for teaching staff and students.

At all times students should feel comfortable to decline any physical contact taking place and professors should be alert to students showing signs of being uncomfortable with contact, which could be for a wide range of reasons.

Physical Contact in Teaching

- Physical contact between professor and student may sometimes constitute a legitimate, recognised teaching method specifically supporting the student's learning (e.g. the use of known, established methods to correct poor posture or to hold a bow or instrument correctly). Where physical contact does constitute a legitimate, recognized teaching method the use of such a method must be underpinned by the informed and ongoing consent of the student and a safe teaching environment.
- To ensure a student has given their informed consent the purpose and form of physical contact must be clearly explained to the student by the professor and the student's consent obtained in advance of any physical contact taking place on every occasion. The explanation of physical contact should be specific and justified e.g. 'may I place my hand under your elbow to adjust your hold' rather than 'may I touch you to adjust your hold'. Stop or avoid physical contact if the student does not give consent or seems uncomfortable.
- Not all students will feel comfortable with the same level of physical contact and this may change over time; reliance on previous consent does not constitute informed consent. Consent needs to be ongoing and must be sought on every occasion.
- It is never acceptable to touch a student on an intimate part of their body.

Students have the right to be taught in a safe and respectful environment. In this context, as in all others, a professor should be sensitive to feedback from their student and should respond accordingly. Professors should be mindful of any conduct or language that may make a student feel uncomfortable or that may be misconstrued.

Any window blind in a teaching room door must always be up when a student is in the room.

Intimacy in Performance and Associated Rehearsals

Consent should be obtained in advance of any physical contact taking place. Consent needs to be ongoing and must be sought on every occasion. Not all students will feel comfortable with the same level of physical contact and this may change over time; reliance on previous consent does not constitute informed consent.

Opera Productions

- An Intimacy Practitioner will facilitate sessions for all students involved in an opera prior to production beginning
- Students should be given the opportunity to state their personal boundaries in advance of all physical and intimacy work
- For productions that are organised, rehearsed and performed by students without staff involvement, a member of staff should still provide guidance where possible
- In rehearsals requiring contact between students, the aim should be to use a staged process to build trust and ensure safety. Those involved should set out and explain guidelines and boundaries clearly and encourage open evaluation of the process. It is important to ensure all students involved are clear and secure on the details of the sequence and contact.

Adjustment of clothing and costumes in fitting, rehearsal, performance and for side stage quick changes

- Agree and rehearse the process before the show with the performer
- Two people should be present wherever possible: one to clear clothing, the other to assist performer with the change
- Provide as little assistance as possible, i.e. only as necessary
- The dresser should not pull up or change undergarments/ tights/ lingerie - this must be left to the performer.

Fitting microphones

- Agree and rehearse the process before the show with the performer
- Two people should be present wherever possible
- Use as little skin contact as possible except to tape
- Where wires need to be threaded under clothing, agree the process before the show with the performer

Definitions

Member of staff includes employees of the College, casual workers, visiting or honorary staff, anyone working within the College under a contract for services and/or in a self-employed capacity. Postgraduate students engaged as Graduate Teaching Assistants are considered members of staff for the purpose of this policy.

Intimacy/intimate scenes: include simulated sexual action, nudity, partial nudity, kissing, bodily function scenes, simulated sexual assault or harassment, physical touch, familial intimacy, medical examinations, childbirth, and more.

Intimacy Practitioner: a trained creative practitioner who works on intimate content for stage and/or screen.

Student includes any person currently studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate or research degree qualification, or on any course arranged by or through the College, including visiting and exchange students, applicants, and offer-holders. It includes students from other Higher Education providers who are completing placements at the College.

The Junior Department has a child protection policy which applies to all of its students.

Approved by RCM Council 2 July 2025