

# SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY

## RCM approach to suicide prevention

The RCM recognises the range of pressures faced by students today, including students in the performing arts. We seek to provide a learning culture where wellbeing is core to every musician's development, where mental health is discussed openly without stigma, and where robust support mechanisms are clearly signposted and accessible to all students. As a community, we are committed to working together to raise awareness of mental health and promote help-seeking behaviour. Our approach brings together staff expertise, strong lines of communication, training, research (including work by the Centre for Performance Science), student feedback and regular review of processes.

The RCM has longstanding arrangements through a whole-College approach to prevent suicide and to identify students at risk of self-harming, suicide or other risks. There exists a web of support that comes from lines of communication through key contacts: Student Services, Heads of Faculty and of Programmes, personal advisers, the Manager at Prince Consort Village and others that channel the identification of students of concern into a formal response through a standing working group. Established procedures include, where appropriate, referral to or liaison with health professionals and contacting nominated trusted emergency contacts and/or emergency services. Ultimately, in the sad instance of a death or other tragic situation, there are established processes for communicating with and supporting those bereaved.

The following tenets underpin and inform the RCM's approach:

- Suicidal thoughts should never be treated as attention-seeking and are always taken seriously
- Heightened suicide risk is most often short-term and situation specific
- Asking whether someone is feeling suicidal does not create or increase risk. It may have the opposite effect
- How we talk about suicide is important: use words that do not stigmatise or criminalise
- Those bereaved by suicide often receive little support even though they are at increased risk of suicide

## Resources to support students

1. Resources to support students are available from Induction, which includes an introductory session outlining the range of services available to students, including counselling, and a presence at Fresher's Fair to promote Student Services. A dedicated Student Services section on the RCM virtual learning platform, Learn.RCM, sets out a range of resources to support student mental health and wellbeing, and also signposts where to go to get support or advice.
2. The RCM provides access to Togetherall: a 24/7 online peer and professional support service that includes access to trained counsellors. Students are also signposted to Imperial College Health Centre, with which RCM has a relationship, to provide a full range of mental health services.
3. The RCM is part of the Healthy Conservatoires Network and our Healthy Musician initiative encourages students to adopt good habits when it comes to their wellbeing. Wellbeing is also located from Year 1 of the BMus core curriculum, delivered by the Centre for Performance Science. Student Services circulates a weekly Friday Focus email newsletter to all students on a range of topics, including mental health and crisis support.
4. The College has established a network of trained staff volunteer Mental Health First Aiders. These are available to both students and staff, providing immediate support to those in distress and signposting individuals to further resources as appropriate. In addition to providing ongoing support and advice to members of staff and line managers, the HR team delivers training through Rethink Mental Illness aimed at improving awareness and understanding of mental health. Contact details of the RCM's Mental Health First Aiders can be found via Reception, Muse & Learn.rcm and on posters around campus. Teaching staff can access information about student mental health and how to respond to concerns through the dedicated Supporting our Students Staff Hub on Learn.rcm.
5. Students are able to feed back on college provisions generally, including pastoral support and awareness of mental health issues, via the Staff Student Committee, which meets regularly. Students are also be able to report instances of racism, harassment and bullying etc anonymously using an online form on Learn.rcm.
6. Student Services runs a range of general wellbeing services to support students, such as free yoga and meditation sessions, and massage therapy (at a reduced rate) . RCM students can also access pastoral support via the Imperial College Chaplaincy Multi Faith Service.

## Identifying and supporting students at risk

7. Students at risk are identified in a range of ways via, but not limited to, professors, fellow students, a member of professional services staff, Prince Consort Village staff and parents worried about a student. The RCM Mental Health Policy sets out guidelines for identifying and responding to students in mental distress.
8. The Code of Practice on Teaching (issued annually to all professors) includes a section on Students of Concern. This says

*In the event that a professor is concerned about a student's wellbeing, there are two actions that they should take:*

- *Inform the relevant Head of Faculty/Programme and the Student Services Manager.*
- *Encourage the student to make contact with Student Services directly, or to other sources of help and support (for example [Togetherall](#), or the [The Samaritans](#)).*

*There are a number of individuals that have been trained in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). Contact details of the RCM's MHFA's can be found via Reception, Muse & Learn.rcm. If there is a risk of any significant immediate harm, do not hesitate in contacting the emergency services.*

9. A network of key RCM staff exist to support students and to communicate with each other, initially informally, including Student Services, Heads of Faculty and of Programmes, the Manager at Prince Consort Village, personal advisers and others that may identify students of concern.
10. Initial responses to concerns may involve referral to one of the trained Mental Health First Aiders, referral to an RCM counsellor, communication with Prince Consort Village staff (re: welfare checks), contact with Imperial College Health Centre or the student's GP (with the student's consent) and/or a meeting with the Student Services Manager, Head of Faculty or of Programmes or a combination of these. If the concern is serious or persists, the College's formal processes are activated.
11. The RCM Mental Health Policy and the Student Code of Conduct and Procedures includes a 'Policy on Students of Concern – Health & Wellbeing', which sets out how we support any student where there is a serious concern. As the preamble to this policy says:

Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their physical and mental wellbeing, and to pursue their studies in a community which promotes equality 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.

12. It is a mandatory requirement for all students to nominate a trusted emergency contact on registration at the RCM. Students are made aware that this person may be contacted in the event of an emergency and that it does not have to be a parent. At the start of each academic year these records are checked with students, in case they need updating. Students have the opportunity to update their trusted emergency contact details at any time.
13. Where a member of the College is concerned about the health and wellbeing of a student, the Student Services Manager will convene a Working Group on Student Health & Wellbeing for a case conference to consider the individual case. The Group comprises the Deputy Director or Director of Programmes (as Chair), Student Services Manager, relevant Head of Faculty and/or Head of Programme. The Group may call upon any of the following in an advisory capacity: RCM Counsellor, Academic Registrar, Personal Adviser 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 (as set out in the The RCM Mental Health Policy) to inform any decisions.
14. The Working Group will generally consider among the following range of actions:
  - 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.
15. In the tragic circumstances of a student death or serious injury or other crisis, the College has a formal procedure in place, as part of its disaster recovery arrangements. This establishes a defined crisis team to deal with the situation, including contacting family and others who need to be informed (while not taking on the role of emergency services), and dealing with any media interest. This also extends to providing support to others in the RCM community, via Student Services and HR.
16. In the event of a student suicide or the College becoming aware of a serious suicide attempt, the College will conduct an immediate review to evaluate its processes and identify whether any lessons can be taken forward to improve support mechanisms and processes.

**Deputy Director**

Kevin Porter  
August 2021

**Policy reviewed by**

Directorate, September 2021  
Student Services Manager, January 2023  
Next review due 2028

**Approved by**

Senate, October 2021, February 2023  
Council, November 2021, March 2023