

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		
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..
Response: • 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. If the student declines to seek help: • 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.	Response: • 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. 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.	Response: • 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 2026

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

Introduction

1. The Royal College of Music is committed to supporting students and recognises the importance of health and wellbeing in relation to academic progression and the wider student experience. Students are encouraged to prioritise their physical and mental wellbeing in a community which promotes equity, inclusion, belonging and mutual respect. There may be occasions when a student's presentation or actions give cause for concern about their health and wellbeing. Interventions by the College may need to be made to address this promptly, acting in the best interests of the student and, in some cases, the wider RCM community, to prevent any further negative consequences.

Policy

2. This policy comprises two formal stages: Stage 1 - Ongoing Concerns; and Stage 2 - Serious Concerns, which are usually preceded by an informal response stage. Stage 1 will normally be implemented in the first instance but, in some circumstances, it may be appropriate to proceed directly to Stage 2. A Student of Concern risk assessment (page X) will be undertaken to inform any decisions and actions.
3. A record of meetings and actions agreed under this policy will be kept confidentially by Student Services.

Informal response to initial concerns

4. If a member of the RCM community has concerns about the health and wellbeing of a student, they should refer them to the Student Services Manager, who will contact the student to offer support. Initial concerns may be raised following the implementation of RCM's Attendance Policy, where relevant.
5. The Student Services Manager will advise the student how they can seek appropriate support. With the student's consent, contact may be made with the Imperial College Health Centre (IHC)/their GP or another medical professional. If relevant, the student will be referred to the Disability Advisor to discuss reasonable adjustments. In certain circumstances, the Programme Lead may approve a Temporary Assessment Plan.
6. Emerging concerns will be discussed informally between relevant staff, which may include Student Services staff, Head of Faculty, Programme Leads, Director of Programmes, Professors, Personal Advisor, Academic Registrar and/or Prince Consort Village management, to gather information, monitor the situation, address any immediate safety concerns and ensure the student is supported.

Stage 1: Ongoing Concerns

7. Where concerns about a student's health and wellbeing are ongoing and significant, with little or no improvement despite reasonable adjustments and offers of support, or where the student has not engaged with support or responded to communication from the College, the student will be invited to a **Stage 1 Student of Concern meeting** with the Student Services Manager and the Programme Lead or Head of Faculty. A student may be referred directly to this stage via RCM's Attendance Policy, if appropriate. The student will be given reasonable notice of any such meeting, normally by email, and if they wish may be accompanied by a friend, who, for these purposes, may only be a fellow RCM student or an officer of the RCM Students' Union.
8. Following this meeting the student will be informed of the outcome in writing. Potential outcomes may include:
 - advising the student to engage with appropriate support, from IHC/their GP, the British Association of Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM), the Disability Advisor, an RCM Counsellor or another agency;
 - establishing regular review meetings with the Student Services Manager, the Programme Lead and/or Head of Faculty, where appropriate;
 - contacting IHC/the student's GP or another appropriate medical professional, with the student's consent;
 - reviewing and implementing any learning support requirements and/or reasonable adjustments;
 - advising the student to consider interrupting their studies to focus on their health and wellbeing.

Stage 2: Serious Concerns

9. Where there are serious and/or persistent concerns about a student's health, wellbeing, engagement, safety and/or fitness to study, the Director of Programmes, Deputy Director and/or Student Services Manager will convene a **Stage 2 Student of Concern Working Group** for a case conference. The Working Group usually comprises the Director of Programmes, Deputy Director or another nominated member of RCM Directorate (as Chair), the Student Services Manager, the relevant Head of Faculty and/or Programme Lead. The Group may invite the following to attend in an advisory role: RCM Counsellor, Disability Advisor, Academic Registrar, Personal Advisor or Principal Study Professor.
10. The Working Group will consider the individual circumstances, risks presented and the best interests of the student to inform any decisions. Not all members of the Working Group need to be available for a decision to be made.
11. The Working Group will determine whether it is appropriate to inform the student in advance that a case conference is being held. This decision will be based on consideration of relevant factors which may include the time-sensitivity of the situation, whether advance notification is likely to cause unnecessary distress to the student, and whether providing such notice is practicable in the specific circumstances. Where advance notice is not given to the student, a rationale for this decision will be recorded.
12. Following the case conference, the student will be informed in writing within five working days of any decisions made and the rationale for the outcome. The Working Group will generally consider the following range of actions, where appropriate:
 - invite the student to meet with relevant staff to discuss next steps;
 - review of reasonable adjustments, which may include alternative modes of assessment;
 - liaise with ICHC/the student's GP or another appropriate medical professional and/or the NHS Mental Health Crisis line to escalate concerns or seek expert guidance;
 - communication with Prince Consort Village to request welfare checks and raise awareness of any risk concerns, in line with the Data Sharing Agreement between Campus Living Villages and the RCM;
 - require the student to be assessed in-person by ICHC. If they are not registered at ICHC, the student will need to seek approval from the Group to be assessed by another appropriate GP/medical practitioner;
 - communication with the student's nominated trusted emergency contact;
 - where there is reason to believe that the student's state of health makes them unable to pursue studies or may cause disruption or serious concern to the wider College community or has the potential to cause harm to themselves or others, the student may be required to take a leave of absence or interrupt studies;
 - the Group may recommend that the student be suspended, as a necessary precautionary measure, or pending disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct;
 - where there is reason to believe that the student will be unable to complete studies within the maximum period of registration, or where there is no realistic prospect of return to study and/or of meeting the competence standards of the programme, the Group may agree the student should be withdrawn from studies. Withdrawal from the programme will only be considered once all possible avenues of support, including reasonable adjustments, have been exhausted.
13. A combination of these actions may be applied at various points and other appropriate options may be considered.
14. Any decision to suspend, interrupt, or withdraw the student from their studies must be agreed by at least two members of the RCM Directorate.
15. If a student who resides at Prince Consort Village is required to interrupt studies or is suspended in accordance with this policy, they will normally be required to vacate Prince Consort Village, in line with their tenancy terms and conditions. At the College's discretion and where appropriate, remaining rental costs for the academic year may be waived.
16. Following any break in studies for reasons relating to health and wellbeing, a student will normally be required to attend an in-person fitness-to-study assessment with ICHC and obtain confirmation in writing that they are fit to resume study. If the student is not registered at ICHC they will need to seek approval from the Group to attend this assessment with another GP/medical practitioner. A student who refuses to undergo this assessment may be suspended until this has taken place.
17. If such an assessment confirms that it is not in the best interests of the student to continue their programme of study, the Group may recommend continuation of interruption or suspension until they are fit to resume. If this means they will exceed the maximum period for completion of the programme, the student will normally be required to withdraw.

Appeal of decisions

18. A student may appeal a decision made at Stage 2 of this policy. A written appeal submission must be received by the Academic Registrar within ten working days of the College providing notification to the student of the Stage 2 outcome. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the Academic Registrar receives the appeal in time.
19. When an appeal is sought, any outcome previously determined will not be imposed until the appeal has been concluded. However, if deemed necessary, the Director of Programmes or Deputy Director may require temporary interruption or other actions in the interests of the student's wellbeing be taken forward as a precautionary measure, which will remain in place until the appeal process has concluded.
20. A student may appeal against the decision of the Working Group, if there are valid grounds. Valid grounds for an appeal are:
 - new evidence has become available which could not reasonably have been brought to the attention of the Working Group*; and/or
 - procedural irregularity; and/or
 - the decision of the Working Group was unreasonable.

*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 in-person medical assessment be obtained from another appropriate GP/medical practitioner.
21. The appeal will be considered by a panel of two members of Directorate or other senior staff who have not had prior involvement in the case and administered by the Clerk to Council.
22. Following consideration of an appeal, the appeal panel may:
 - reject the appeal and confirm that the original decision of the Working Group stands;
 - refer the matter back to the Student of Concern Working Group for reconsideration;
 - revoke a decision made by the Student of Concern Working Group and confirm a revised decision.
23. The student shall be informed of the outcome of the appeal in writing, usually by email to their RCM email account, usually within five working days following consideration of the appeal

Student of Concern risk assessment

Informal discussions between relevant staff and the student

- Check attendance/engagement data
- Is the student aware of their health and wellbeing needs?
- Has the student shared any information for consideration?
- Does the student require reasonable adjustments?
- Is the student engaging with appropriate support or showing willingness to do so?

- monitor;
- signpost to GP/ICHC - send letter (with student consent);
- signpost to RCM Counselling or other support agencies;
- invite student to discuss reasonable adjustments;
- set up review meetings with relevant staff member;
- signpost Mitigating Circumstances;
- agree a Temporary Assessment Plan;
- agree safety plan with student.

Stage 1 meeting with the student and relevant staff

- Refer to informal response stage checklist
- Are the student's studies at risk?
- Is the student able to stay safe and seek support to do so?
- Might the student benefit from time away from studies to focus on their health?

- any of the actions outlined in the informal response stage;
- advise the student to engage with appropriate support;
- review reasonable adjustment requirements;
- advise about interruption;
- communication with PCV.

Stage 2 Working Group to convene

- Refer to Stage 1 checklist
- Is the student responding to communications from the College?
- Is the wider College community impacted?
- Can the student progress/complete studies in time?
- Is the student well enough to continue studying?
- Have PCV carried out a welfare check?

- any actions outlined in previous stages;
- invite the student to meet with relevant staff;
- contact with ICHC/GP or NHS Crisis line for guidance;
- communication with nominated trusted emergency contact;
- require assessment by ICHC/GP;
- require leave of absence or interruption;
- suspension of studies, as a precautionary measure;
- withdraw the student from studies.