

# 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 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 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 Agreements
- Respect confidentiality and data protection guidelines, 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 well be attributable to other causes, such as money worries or accommodation problems, and 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 by 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.

## Responding to students with mental health issues

Applicants to RCM are invited to disclose whether they have any disability or health issue, including mental health problems. 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. In this regard it is important that the college is accurate about the level of support that can be provided, whether relating to teaching and learning or more personal issues, so that applicants can make informed judgements about their choices. Whilst we are required to make 'reasonable adjustments' for students disclosing disability, there are, unfortunately, no hard and fast rules which dictate what is and what is not 'reasonable'. It can only ultimately be tested in a court of law. If an applicant or student discloses a particular diagnosed condition e.g. schizophrenia, assumptions should not be made about that individual's ability to pursue their studies or their likely behaviour.

Once enrolled, the student will be invited to set up a Learning Agreement, which will document the student's assessments with such adjustments that may be agreed; this will be circulated in confidence to such staff as the student feels appropriate.

Each individual will vary in the pattern and impact of their particular health issue, so there are no routine adjustments. However, it is likely to be helpful for the individual to have an agreed period of flexibility beyond the nominal deadlines to hand in assessments; some may have fluctuating conditions, with good and bad days, so additional time will compensate for time lost on bad days. 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.

Other adjustments may include, but are not necessarily limited to, receiving principal study lessons outside of college (with the agreement of the Head of Faculty), individual arrangements for recitals e.g. no members of the public to be present, submitting work electronically, or alternative methods of assessment to be determined in conjunction with the relevant Head of Programmes. If a student has been assigned a mental health or social worker, then, subject to the student's consent, Student Services will endeavour to work with them in supporting the student.

There will, however, be a number of students who do not disclose mental health issues prior to enrolling, for a number of reasons, which may include fear of discrimination and stigmatisation, as well as those who may 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 well being and ability to study, and 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 incipient mental health issues.

## Disclosure on course and fitness to study

### Confidentiality and disclosure

- Do not disclose personal or sensitive information about students to other students or anyone outside the College, including parents, without the student's explicit consent.
- If the parents 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).
- Treat personal information about students with discretion.
- Only disclose the minimum information necessary
- Only disclose to those who need to know
- If you need to disclose tell the student of your decision to disclose without their consent and your reasons for doing so (unless this in itself would risk or prompt harm)
- Document your decision to disclose and your reasons for doing so

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

Please see the RCM Policy on the General Data Protection Regulations: <https://www.rcm.ac.uk/websitepolicies/privacy/>

### Level 1

#### If a student tells you directly that they are experiencing mental health difficulties and you think there is no immediate risk of harm to them or others:

- Listen carefully and respectfully to what they are telling you
- Be supportive, but be clear about the limits of that support – you may need to seek advice
- If the student is struggling with their studies, suggest an action plan and agree to review the situation in, say, one month's time
- Encourage the student to seek appropriate help if they have not already done so or speak to Student Services in confidence to find sources of help. Togetherall ([www.togetherall.com](http://www.togetherall.com)) is a valuable online resource providing confidential, 24/7 mental health support.
- 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, or if their behaviour is disruptive
- If in doubt, seek advice from Student Services

If the student declines to seek help:

- You can make it clear that you will help if the student changes his or her mind
- Seek advice from Student Services
- Monitor the situation
- Alert your Head of Faculty or appropriate Head of Programmes
- If possible, make a record of the conversation and ask the student to sign it. If he/she refuses, record your concerns

It should be noted in particular, that if a student discloses a disability (including a mental health issue) to 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 an appropriate member of staff e.g. Student Services Manager or relevant Head of Programmes. If they insist on complete confidentiality with you, explain in advance that it may not be possible to make all the support arrangements they may need, and that if you are worried about their safety or the safety of others, you cannot undertake to keep this information to yourself.

## Level 2

**If there are accumulating concerns or the student's behaviour suggests that if the situation is not addressed promptly, they are in danger of harming themselves or another, attempt to talk to the student about your concerns:**

- Offer to contact Imperial College Health Centre to arrange for an urgent appointment. Call 0207 584 6301 and explain that the situation is urgent and that you need to speak to the Duty Doctor. If the Health Centre is closed, follow the instructions on the answerphone.
- You should also seek assistance from a Mental Health First Aider or Student Services; if no-one is available, contact Secretariat, or call the Facilities (extension 4315) if out of normal office hours.
- At this level, it is likely to be appropriate for the Deputy Director (or other member of the Directorate) to call a case conference (see Appendix A) to discuss the student's fitness to study.

## Level 3

**If the student's behaviour suggests there is an imminent danger to themselves or others:**

- Try and stay calm
- Ensure your safety and that of the student and any others
- If possible, try to reassure the student and keep them calm, preferably away from onlookers, but do not risk antagonising them
- Dial 999 and say that you require attendance due to a mental health incident
- The police have powers under the 2007 Mental Health Act to remove someone thought to be suffering from a mental illness to a place of safety for assessment by a psychiatrist
- At the earliest opportunity inform the Student Services Manager of the incident – 0207 591 4316. If she/he is not available, contact Secretariat 0207 591 4363 or call Facilities (extension 4315) if out of normal office hours.
- The Student Services Manager or Secretariat will arrange for the next of kin to be contacted, if appropriate
- Reassure other students; refer to Student Services if they are disturbed or upset, but do not engage in discussion of the individual student's situation
- Write a report of the incident and forward to the Student Services Manager and Deputy Director at the earliest opportunity
- The student's return to College will be subject to the fitness to return to study procedure, detailed in the policy on students showing signs of psychological or other health problems, (See Appendix A).

At any level of concern expressed you can call on one of the RCM's trained Mental Health First Aiders, much as you would when someone has an accident or becomes unwell. The list is posted on the RCM Human Resources webpage and learn.

Consider your own health and well-being. Whatever the severity of an individual's mental health difficulties it can be challenging, overwhelming or disturbing 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 Confidential Care <https://www.well-online.co.uk/> 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?

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 behaviour, especially if they are volatile, seemingly disconnected from reality or aggressive, 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, this is an indicator that immediate referral to medical services must be made. Contact a Mental Health First Aider, the Student Services Manager or Secretariat if unavailable, enlisting the help of RCM Facilities staff if necessary.

## **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
- Explain that if you think the student is at risk or a risk to others you may need to seek advice
- 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/Counselling Service
- Seek advice from Student Services
- Alert your Head of Faculty or appropriate Head of Programmes

## **Interruption of studies and fitness to return to study**

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, exceptionally, 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.

The decision as to whether a re-entry examination is required rests with the relevant Head of Programmes 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.

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.

Prior to resuming studies, the RCM will usually 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**

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.

## **Counselling service for students**

The RCM student counselling service is located within Student Services, and the two counsellors provide support 5 days per week during term time only. 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 is occasionally the need for a waiting list. A student will normally be offered up to 6 sessions of counselling. Where a Counsellor assesses that an individual student requires longer term therapy, psychiatric or psychological assessment, she/he 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.

## Appendix A: Policy on students of concern – health and well-being

Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their physical and mental well-being, and to pursue their studies in a community which promotes equality and mutual respect.

However, there may be occasions when a student exhibits behaviours or actions which give cause for concern about their health or well-being, and interventions by the College will need to be made in the interest of the safety and well-being of the individual and the wider college community and society as a whole.

1. The College may require a student to be assessed by Imperial College Health Service, or other appropriate medical practitioner approved by the Health Service, if there is reason to believe that the student's state of health makes them unable to pursue their studies, or causes disruption or serious concern to other members of the College community, or causes or has the potential to cause harm to themselves or others. This sanction will usually only be used where the student has not taken the option of voluntarily seeking professional support, whether from the Counsellor or from Imperial College Health Service.
2. The College has a Working Group on Student Health Problems which will meet as needed for case conferences to consider individual cases. The Group comprises the Deputy Director (as Chair), Student Services Manager, the relevant Head of Programmes (or Assistant), relevant Head of Faculty, and one of the Counsellors (in an advisory role). Members of the Working Group will often 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. In dealing with students, the Working Group will consider the individual circumstances presented and form its views taking these into account. There are four general courses of action that the Working Group will generally consider:
  - pursue no further action;
  - advise a student to seek professional help voluntarily, whether from the Counsellor or from Imperial College Health Service or another agency;
  - require a student to be assessed by Imperial College Health Service;
  - recommend to the Director that a student be suspended, pending disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct.

At different stages in dealing with individual cases, a range or a combination of these options may be applied; equally the Working Group will not be bound by these options if the circumstances suggest a different approach may be more appropriate to the individual circumstances.

3. If a medical assessment confirms that it is not in the interests of the student or the College that the student should continue his/her programme of study, the Working Group may recommend to the Director that the student is suspended until he/she is fit to continue his/her studies.
4. A student who refuses to undergo assessment may be suspended by the Director 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.
5. A student who is suspended or is subject to any other restriction on his/her 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.