



Statement on intimacy and physical contact in rehearsals, performances and on set

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The wellbeing of students and staff¹ at the University of Essex is safeguarded through due diligence undertaken in preparation for, and performance of, works which involve physical intimacy. This includes, but is not limited to, nudity, partial nudity, simulated sex acts, kissing, and depicted and/or simulated violence.

The University has developed principles-based minimum requirements for each department and school in which such activity takes place. Each department or school operationalises these minimum requirements at local level and develops their own policies or protocols, with reference to their own contexts.

These requirements also sit alongside a range of University policies to promote zero tolerance to abuse and harassment. More information about these policies are available on the University's website and via the comprehensive source of information, collated in support of the University's compliance with the requirements of the Office for Students.

Minimum requirements

1. Development of local protocols

All Departments and Schools or other relevant units within the University where education delivery, research or other activities include intimacy in rehearsals, performances or on set must establish a local policy or protocol based on these minimum requirements.

2. Review and assurance

All local policies and protocols are reviewed annually by the Safeguarding Advisory Group on behalf of the Executive Committee to ensure they align with these minimum requirements.

¹ For the purpose of this Statement, the term 'staff' may include employees of the University, consultants, freelance workers, self-employed and agency workers.

3. Communication of protocols

All local policies and protocols must be communicated appropriately and used as a means to agree an approach to work, establish boundaries and ensure propriety of self-directed and/or devised work.

4. Justification

Staff and students should be mindful that any performance and/or artistic activity (such as rehearsal) involving physical intimacy must be justifiable as being for the public good on the grounds that it is in the interests of drama, literature or learning, for example where it is integral to a script. The member of staff responsible for the activity must be able to demonstrate that where possible alternative options to the level of intimacy required have been considered as part of the creative process.

5. Risk assessment

The relevant member of staff must undertake a risk assessment in advance of an activity or piece of work involving intimacy being authorised. This must consider all relevant risks and identify and implement mitigating actions for minimising or preventing them.²

² Examples of non-exhaustive prompts would be:

- coercion, or being bullied into taking part (by both the department and/or peers)
- online bullying / trolling / body shaming
- post event stalking / sexual assault
- inappropriate publication of images at a later date
- viewing age protocol and warnings on leaflets / website / online
- rehearsals limited to relevant actors only
- actors' rights to have parts of scene deleted if unintended exposure happens / out-takes not to be kept
- whether any student participants are under 18
- how personal data will be used and whether a Data Protection Impact Assessment has been completed

6. Age requirements

All staff and students involved in a piece of work which includes physical intimacy must be over 18 years old.

7. Informed decisions

In any production which includes physical intimacy, all students shall be informed of this fact by the member of staff responsible, along with a description of the general nature and extent of such intimacy. To allow the students to make an informed decision, where physical intimacy is required within a production, the extent of the requirement, including the degree and/or nature and extent of any intimacy, must be plainly described and discussed with the student(s) within a class setting. Students must be given reasonable time to consider the requirements, and an environment where they feel comfortable to ask questions, seek further information and share if they are feeling uncomfortable.

8. Freedom to opt out without negative impact

Students must be able opt-out of an activity involving physical intimacy; where the activity forms part of assessed coursework, alternative assessment options must be offered. By opting out of an activity, students must feel reassured that this will not impinge on, or negatively affect, their grade or opportunities in further performances. If a student opts-out of a piece of work that includes nudity and/or simulated sex-acts, where the piece forms part of an academic assessment and/or coursework, the member of staff overseeing the activity must consider and ensure that an alternative and suitable form of assessment is made available. This decision must be recorded and held by the Department or School on the relevant electronic student file.

9. Complaints and redress

Students who feel that they have been disadvantaged or discriminated against as a result of a request to opt out of an activity involving intimacy can voice their concerns via the appropriate route, such as Student Complaints procedure, Report and Support, our Code of Student of Conduct, the academic appeals procedure, and/or submission of extenuating circumstances.

10. Auditions

Auditions must not require nudity or close physical intimacy.

11. In scene/activity standards

When sculpting a scene requiring physical intimacy, the following must be standard practice:

- a) A third party must be present at all times, keeping the work professional, not private.

- b) Areas of physical touch must be agreed and documented in advance: there must be no improvisation, and everyone must stick to what has been agreed. If it is felt, during a rehearsal, that other areas of touch should be included these must be discussed and documented before being included.
- c) The physical actions must be planned and directed using plain words, making clear that those performing the scene can stop at any time if they are feeling uncomfortable.
- d) Consideration must be given to using genital barriers.
- e) On stage, when the rehearsal includes physical intimacy, a closed set must be used.
- f) During rehearsals and on set, as a courtesy to others, performers should not be unclothed when they are not required to do so.

12. Personal image data

Photographs/video depicting students in the nude, partly nude and/or in simulated sex acts may only be retained in line with the University's retention schedule and only recorded and/or retained, where appropriate for retention to go ahead, on University devices, unless the student has submitted an explicit written request to the contrary and explicit consent has also been received from any other data subjects included in the imagery or footage. Photographs/video depicting students in the nude, partly nude and/or in simulated sex acts may not be used for purposes other than coursework or assessment unless the student has given their explicit written consent for other uses. The rationale for capturing and retaining photographs/video for purposes other than coursework or assessment should be confirmed by the relevant academic department. Any photographs/videos must be stored in line with both General Data Protection Regulations and University's [Information Security Policy \(.pdf\)](#) and [IT Acceptable Use Policy](#). Photographs/video depicting students in the nude, partly nude and/or in simulated sex acts must never be stored on personal IT equipment belonging to staff or students or portable media devices (such as USB drives or SD cards) irrespective of ownership. The processing, retention, and sharing of personal image data are managed in accordance with the [University's Student Privacy Notice](#), which sets out the lawful basis for processing personal data for academic purposes and outlines the circumstances under which data may be shared with statutory regulatory bodies, such as the Office for Students.

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