



EQUITY



EQUITY/BECTU:

# Higher Education Intimacy Coordination & Direction Guidelines

# Introduction

The #MeToo movement, and the subsequent raised awareness and urgency for consent-based performance practices in the stage and screen industries, has led to re-examination of the current practices and pedagogy behind performing arts and film training in higher education. In the context of drama schools and other higher education institutions (HEI), intimacy as a form of physical storytelling is not only about sex scenes and nudity, but about the individual and their learning experience. This individual experience links very strongly with protected characteristics identified within EDI policy and the Equality Act 2010. Understanding the link between creative risk (vulnerability) and psychological safety is crucial for the development of sustainable performance practices and our future artists.

Based on the experiences of working Intimacy Practitioners, the influence of intimacy work in actor training enables a deeper level of creative risk-taking in a carefully scaffolded brave space. Through this evolving paradigm in training, we are not only addressing the more obvious issues that arise from sexual misconduct. Intimacy education addresses a much wider collection of concerns which ultimately feed into the

ever-increasing mental health issues faced by the student body in higher education. Touch, if practiced with care and consent, is a powerful and influential embodied pedagogical tool in performing arts training. This guidance does not aim to discourage touch or intimate content as a pedagogical tool, but rather offer a framework that allows those involved in the process to practice touch safely, consensually and effectively, ultimately optimising the training environment.

HEIs should have an active role in what intimacy practice looks like in their institution in the future. To design and develop effective consent based actor training, institutions are encouraged to hire Intimacy Practitioners (IPs) to provide training in understanding consent, setting boundaries, and agreements for touch. The IP can support in dealing with challenging material and provide consultancy starting from the early stages of a project, casting and auditions. Enough time should be allocated for these critical conversations within the department between staff members while planning for intimate content for the new academic year, as well as for conversations between staff members and students.



# Overview

The purpose of this guidance is to create a united approach to understanding consent and intimacy, and how power dynamics affect student engagement in the creation of intimate scenes. This guidance also aims to empower students and staff in performing arts and creative HEIs to feel braver and more prepared in the staging of intimacy in the future.

This guidance suggests starting with organising a staff development day around intimacy and consent practices. The staff development that an IP can provide will hopefully serve as a starting point for departments to start considering their approach to handling intimacy in:

- Classroom settings
- Auditions/casting
- Staff-led productions (in-house and external)
- Student-led productions

Casting disclosure forms are created to enable unbiased casting, appropriate recognition of gender and to promote safer acting practices. These include working within a container for the creative tasks and using intentional warm ups and cool downs (de-roling). Additionally, intimacy and consent practices should be built into the curriculum throughout BA and MA studies. As part of the curriculum, this guidance suggests inviting Intimacy Practitioners to provide:

- Student workshops
- Production support

In the workshops throughout their training, the students build an understanding of consent

and boundaries; identifying moments of intimacy; embedding movement techniques in intimate storytelling, using breath, choreography, closure practices, and more. This work builds on having conversations about intimate content with fellow actors, directors, designers, and producers. Once the students have a grounding in consent and an understanding of the negotiation and renegotiation of boundaries in practice through workshops, the IP serves the students and staff in a similar way that a fight director / stunt coordinator does with violent content; by helping to create visually gripping scenes, rooted in the storytelling, engaged with structures and safety protocols that promote individual agency, and a sense of belonging and accomplishment. This engagement with an IP through Productions (production support), prepares the students for the industry. Working professionally with an Intimacy Practitioner in an educational setting, therefore, also supports resilience, employability and the business of creativity.

## Definitions

**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. For a comprehensive list see [page 6 of Bectu's Shooting Intimacy Guidance](#).

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

**Intimacy Coordinator/Director:** Some Intimacy Practitioners use "Intimacy Coordinator" for working on recorded

media and “Intimacy Director” for live performance. Others might use “Intimacy Coordinator” for all content.

**Higher Education Institution (HEI):** post-secondary education that may result in an academic degree, diploma or certificate, for example, Universities and Drama Schools.

**Power Dynamic:** Power is a dynamic which is present in every relationship. Some dynamics are healthy, contributing to collaboration, development and empowerment. Others, however, can be toxic, leading to resentment, imbalance and harm/violence.

**Sexual harassment:** “In England and Wales, the legal definition of sexual harassment is when someone carries out unwanted sexual behaviour towards another person that makes them feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated” ([Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)).

**Consent:** Intimacy Coordination and Intimacy Direction are built on consent-based practice. HEIs should infuse a comprehensive approach to consent into their navigation of intimate scenes and physical touch in their classrooms. Planned Parenthood, an American non-profit focusing on reproductive healthcare and sex education, has summarised what consent in a real sexual context needs to be into the acronym, FRIES:

**F**reely Given  
**R**eversible  
**I**nformed  
**E**nthusiastic  
**S**pecific

An American intimacy training company, Intimacy Directors & Coordinators inc. (IDC), recently adapted the acronym from FRIES to CRISP to fit better for the professional context of simulated intimate content that Intimacy Practitioners work with:

**C**onsidered  
**R**eversible  
**I**nformed  
**S**pecific  
**P**articipatory

These five elements must be present when staging intimacy or navigating touch for it to be true consent.

**Considered:** “We can’t fully erase the power dynamics, systemic racism, and other effects of oppression that make freely given consent difficult, but we can consider all of the factors and information when ultimately making a decision about whether to give or withhold consent. This requires time and space for actors [or students] to get the information they need and consider all of the potential repercussions associated with their decision” (IDC).

**Reversible:** “Anyone can change their mind about what they feel like doing, anytime” (Planned Parenthood). An actor may agree to try some intimate choreography but change their mind, they may do it in one rehearsal but not the next, or one production but not next term’s production.

**Informed:** Communicating honestly about what is going to happen and when. This includes letting actors know ahead of time when they will be rehearsing intimate moments.

**Specific:** Saying yes to one thing doesn't mean someone has said yes to other intimacy. There should be no vagueness over physically intimate choreography, e.g. "on that line, touch him" is not specific enough for someone to consent to an action.

**Participatory:** "People need to be involved in the decision making process around what happens with and to their body! It means that decisions aren't just handed down to actors about what will happen in a scene, but that they are invited into the conversation as full and equal participants in the creative decision making process." (IDC)

## Ongoing safety and considerations for duty of care

This guidance is one resource sign-posting institutions toward best practice when working with intimate content. This is not an overarching rule book and should not be considered as the be-all and end-all. This guidance relies on institutions having already instilled comprehensive support for the wellbeing of their students through ongoing anti-racist work, mental health first aid provisions and harassment and bullying awareness. The increased diversity of representation in teaching and directing staff, and their continued efforts in sourcing materials (plays, scripts, study materials etc.) that deliver storytelling reflective of the diversity of the student cohort, creates a solid foundation for intimacy work.

Safety is a physical, emotional, psychological, and cultural condition, it can never be guaranteed. However, we can

remove some obstacles to safety by building a culture of care. In an intimacy context, this is an active and ongoing way of being, or leading, which prioritises autonomy, equity, and support in the student cohort/community. As part of this care, and the continuous development of student-centric approaches to training, the following foundational structures should be in place for all student activities - but they are also essential to good intimacy practice. What these might look like at each institution could vary and evolve over time.

### Content note

This is advance information about the upcoming experience so that individuals can make an informed decision about how and if they engage with said experience. Content notes (disclosures, content/trigger warnings) are a necessity to state the potentially challenging aspects of the piece clearly and simply. Content notes can be for classes,



homework, rehearsals, and/or performance as participants (cast/ crew) or an audience

### **Community agreements**

Community agreements tap into the values of what the community holds important within the context of the work done together. Agreements may include notes on time keeping, agreement on areas of touch or language used and any other points to remove barriers to safety and increase comfort and care.

### **Access needs**

Everyone has access needs. Some are more visible or critical than others but reminding individuals that everyone has access needs can foster self-advocacy and increase the sense of autonomy (agency). Access needs can be physical / medical / emotional / general, e.g. needing frequent bathroom breaks, larger print, needing to face toward the door, or to leave by 5PM to pick up someone. Acknowledging the various needs in the space, encourages an authentic presence, and sense of inclusion and belonging which is crucial for safety in learning.

### **Reporting pathways**

Institutions should have their policies and procedures for Bullying & Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence. Reporting pathways are formal or informal procedures in which an individual might report and reach a resolution for a concern. These processes should be easy to access, available to all, and clarified / reiterated at the beginning of each class / unit / year to enable transparency and accountability.

### **Policies & protocols**

This guidance relies on institutions updating

their reporting protocols, best practice and staff training around:

- Sexual harassment
- Responding to disclosures of sexual violence
- Unconscious bias
- Safeguarding
- Mental health (all staff should be MHFA trained)  
Bullying and harassment

## **Process for working with intimacy**

### **Staff working with touch and intimate content**

Practitioners should reflect on the use of touch in their teaching. There should not be staff-student touch without an established framework for how it will happen and the reasons why it is part of the learning process. There must be a clear process for ongoing consent between staff and students.

It is recommended for HEIs to facilitate an Intimacy session with staff about the basics of consent and working on physical touch, run by an Intimacy Practitioner. Factor in permanent versus visiting staff. Ideally visiting staff are part of this learning. If this is not possible, then these staff members should be educated accordingly on the HEI's policy and practice.

For a more detailed understanding, find the article [Maintaining the consent-bubble: an intimacy coordinator's perspective on touch in performance training](#) in the resources listed at the end of this guidance, which says that: "...purposefully consenting to touch

constructs a metaphorical ‘consent-bubble’ in which only those invited into its parameters (often not including the IC, facilitator or teacher) may engage in touch, considering they comply with its uniquely constructed rules and boundaries. To do so, emphasis is laid on the intricacies, processes and importance of communication and consent within the scope of touch and performing arts training. In addition, it is argued that the lack of such consent results in embodied self-preservation and tension activation strategies that halt effective learning.” (Haarhoff & Lush 2023)

### **Intimacy Education as part of the Students’ Curriculum**

Intimacy practice should be embedded into the students’ curriculum, as part of their comprehensive training and preparation for a career in the creative industries. This is true of actors, stage managers, directors, movement directors, technical roles, and anyone who may have to work with or alongside Intimacy Practitioners on stage or screen.

Consider how Intimacy practice will be woven into the students’ learning. What structure will this take that allows students to comprehensively understand the tools, processes, methodology, equipment, and choreography behind creating intimate scenes? HEIs should plan for this as they would for stage combat or accent work, with all due considerations regarding hiring, scheduling, and budgeting.

This learning about intimacy practice should be designed and delivered by an Intimacy Practitioner, in conversation with the department head(s). Intimacy Directors & Coordinators have extensive training, expertise and industry-experience to be able

to work with students effectively.

HEIs should only employ fully trained and qualified Intimacy Practitioners who have the training and experience required for this line of work. Students put a level of trust into a practitioner running an intimacy session and it being improperly navigated can lead to harm.

### **Intimacy in HE Productions - for Staff & Students**

- Plan early for the inclusion of Intimacy in the productions and take it into consideration while content sourcing (selecting plays / screenplays) and preparing for casting and auditions (use of disclosure forms and risk assessments).
- Plan for the IP’s early involvement through scheduling and budgeting considerations (e.g. workshops, modesty garments and more).
- An IP can help there be clarity around auditions and casting and the Intimacy required or desired for certain roles, and can facilitate discussions with prospective actors ahead of casting.
- Productions in Drama Schools are particularly likely to be directed by external visiting staff, who may not have education in Intimacy fundamentals, and can generally fall beyond the protections of the HEI. Show them this document, educate them about Intimacy and best practice, and maintain that there are still ongoing protections for students.
- Collaborate with other external content experts when needed, e.g. wellbeing facilitators, LGBTQIA+ consultants, etc.
- Intimacy Rehearsals: include bespoke Intimacy rehearsals of the intimate content. The IP will discuss how this can

be done effectively and safely.

- Intimacy rehearsals should be Closed Rehearsals, with only absolutely relevant members of the team in the room (i.e. cast, director, AD, SM). A sign on the door can stop people from entering the space.
- Intimacy during Tech: depending on the intimate content, tech sessions may be needed for the Intimacy. For example, simulated sex is usually checked in tech and levels of nudity will need bespoke considerations.
- Intimacy during Dress & Performance: Stage Management should keep check-ins going between shows to ensure ongoing, active consent is maintained.
- Shooting Intimacy: for short films, showreels, or any recorded media including Intimacy, the above considerations should be taken into account where relevant. The IP will discuss how this can be done effectively and safely. For more information please check Bectu's [Shooting Intimacy Guidance](#).
- Special considerations for student-led rehearsals and productions:
- For productions that are organised, rehearsed and performed by students without staff involvement, the HEI should still provide guidance where possible.
- HEIs should advise and support students on their intimate content, which may include facilitating the involvement of an IP, especially for intimate scenes with a higher level of risk.
- Students should not be used in lieu of professional Intimacy Practitioners. Much like one wouldn't have an untrained Fight Director, there is risk

for all involved (including the student serving as an IP) if this happens.

Have a look at the already existing HE Intimacy Guidelines at the end of this document.

## When to hire an IP (IC/ID)

[Intimacy Coordinators Aotearoa \(ICA\)](#) have created a [1-pager](#) clarifying when to hire an Intimacy Practitioner in the industry. Due to the inherent power dynamics, and higher level of risk at play in a HEI setting, we have adapted the ICA list for higher education below. (This includes reclassifying the presence of an IP for staged passionate kissing as "Essential" rather than "Recommended".) For the reasons above, Institutions should carefully consider whether nudity is actually required, and explore options for implication, illusion and states of undress instead, where applicable. This reduces risk whilst allowing students to learn about nudity protocols and processes.

### When to hire an Intimacy Practitioner ESSENTIAL

- There is nudity or partial nudity (exposure of anything normally covered by swimwear) -> Altered for HEI: There are states of undress and illusions of nudity as part of storytelling
- There is simulated sex (including simulated manual stimulation, oral sex or penetrative sex)
- There is intimacy including minors or vulnerable artists
- There is simulated sexual assault or non-consensual action (also requires a Stunt Coordinator)



- An actor or member of the creative team has requested an Intimacy Practitioner
- There is intense kissing or “making out”
- There is physical touch or groping of the body that may be sensitive or triggering

## RECOMMENDED

- There is light and/or casual physical touch
- There is light kissing
- There is chemistry or sexually charged content

## Closing thoughts

This guidance has suggested that HEIs should have an active role in what Intimacy Practice looks like in their institution in the future. In this document, we have offered staff and students an approach to understanding the importance of consent and boundaries in the creation of intimacy for screen and stage in HEIs and we have highlighted how power dynamics affect consent and student engagement. Institutions are encouraged to hire Intimacy Practitioners (IPs) to provide training for staff and students. This might also mean that with the facilitation of an IP, each HEI creates their own framework to support the delivery of intimacy in actor training, that celebrates the type of acting philosophies unique to each training institution.

You can find a trained and qualified Intimacy Practitioner via contacting BECTU at [www.bectuintimacybranch.co.uk](http://www.bectuintimacybranch.co.uk) or you can contact Equity.

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## Further resources

### Literature

Black, A. & Newhauser T. M (2023) Supporting Staged Intimacy: A Practical Guide for Theatre Creatives, Managers, and Crew. Routledge, Oxon.

Busselle, K. (2021) Deroling and Debriefing Essential aftercare for educational theater. Johns Hopkins University Press Volume 31, Number 2, July 2021. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/802105/summary> Accessed 30/7/2023

Coffey, V., Jones, H., Selva, M. & Zachar, T. (2019). Shifting the Landscape: Why Changing Actor Training Matters in Light of the #MeToo Movement. Polish Theatre Journal. Polish Theatre Institute and Theatre Academy.

Ewan, V. & Green, D. (2015) Actor Movement: Expression of the Physical Being (Chapter 9: Personal Safety in Movement). Methuen Drama. London, UK.

Haarhoff, E. & Lush, K. (2023) Maintaining the consent bubble an intimacy coordinator's perspective on touch in performance training. Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Volume 14, 2023 - Issue 2

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19443927.2023.2191987>

McNamara, A. (2022) Be the Change: Learning and Teaching for the Creative Industries (Chapter 6: Intimacy and Actor training/ Ryan, Ewan). Nova Science Publishers, Inc. New York

Moor, A. (2023) Consent based actor

training as the only way forward. Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Volume 14, 2023. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19443927.2023.2191986> Accessed 30/7/2023

Pace, C. (2020) Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy. Routledge, Oxon.

Rickman, P. (2023) 'Techniques for Action within Actor Boundaries for Film and Theatre', in R e Arp-Dunham, J. (ed.) Stanislavsky and Intimacy. London, Routledge.

Shawyer, S. & Shively, K. (2019) Education in Theatrical Intimacy as Ethical Practice for University Theater. Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism, Volume 34, Number 1, Fall 2019. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/749729>

### Intimacy Guidance and Resources

Bectu's Shooting Intimacy Guidance - Comprehensive document with thorough information about the entire process of shooting intimacy professionally

Bectu's Shooting Intimacy Quick-Guide for Performers - one-page of essential information for Performers. Could be distributed with welcome packs or other documents for students.

Bectu's Shooting Intimacy Quick-Guide for Productions - one-page document, could be placed on green rooms, common rooms, staff rooms, etc.

Guidance on Trauma-Informed Practice (not specifically for performance).

DirectorsUK: Directing Nudity and Simulated Sex



IDC on CRISP: Defining Consent from FRIES to CRISP (Mythen 2022)

Planned Parenthood on FRIES: Sexual Consent

Boundaries for Actors: Yes / No / Maybe List

Casting Disclosure Form: Available in Pace, C. (2020) Staging Sex: Best Practices, Tools, and Techniques for Theatrical Intimacy. Routledge, Oxon.

**HE Specific Intimacy Guidelines**  
[Cambridge University Intimacy Direction Guidelines](#) (Taylor Hunt 2023)

Coffey, V. (2019) Intimacy guidelines for student work. Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Rickman, P. (2021) Working with Intimacy at the School of Film, Media & Performing Arts. University for the Creative Arts.

[The Lir Intimacy Policy.pdf \(thelir.ie\)](#)

### **Equity Resources**

Equity UK [Dignity At Work Hub](#) (includes information and support for members on Creating Safe Spaces, Bullying & Harassment, Mental Health, the Equity4Women Toolkit and more)

Equity UK [Know Your Rights Hub](#) (includes advice on Your Right to Equal Treatment, Menopause Friendly Workspaces, Equity's Student Film Guidelines and more)

Equity UK's Student Organisers ([students@equity.org.uk](mailto:students@equity.org.uk)) and [Student Deputy Programme](#)

### **International Intimacy Resources:**

Australia / Equity & MEAA: <https://www.meaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/MEAA-Intimacy-Guidelines-for-Stage-and-Screen.pdf>

Canada / ACTRA: <https://www.actratontario.com/nudity-intimacy/>

Finland / FFF: <https://ses.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Guidelines-for-intimate-scenes.pdf>

Intimacy Practitioners' Guild EU/UK (IPG): <https://theintimacyguild.com>

New Zealand / Equity: [https://equity.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Intimacy\\_Guidelines\\_Equity\\_NZ\\_v0.6.pdf](https://equity.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Intimacy_Guidelines_Equity_NZ_v0.6.pdf)

South Africa / IPSA: <https://intimacysouthafrica.org.za/protocols/>

Sweden: [https://filmtvp.se/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Riktlinjer\\_intimscener\\_film\\_dramaprod-ENG-1.pdf](https://filmtvp.se/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Riktlinjer_intimscener_film_dramaprod-ENG-1.pdf)

## **Working with an Intimacy Coordinator**

Finland: <https://www.ses.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Laheisyyskoreografin-kanssa-tyoskentely-ENGL.pdf>

USA / SAG-AFTRA: <https://www.sagaftra.org/contracts-industry-resources/workplace-harassment-prevention/intimacy-coordinator-resources>

