

Welfare Guidelines

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taff

Oxford University
Theatre Technicians
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Aims

This document has been created to provide some guidance to TAFF members and their production teams on good practice backstage, to ensure that welfare across the team is given due attention, during what can be an intense although rewarding process. The guidelines are based on responses to the TAFF Welfare Questionnaire, as well as OUDS, Equity, the Oxford University SU and Backstage.ie. The guidelines are intended as recommendations, and it is every TAFF member's responsibility ensure that good welfare is practised in productions.

Production Calls & Advertisements

Production roles should be advertised inclusively, encouraging students of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and identities, and with as much or little experience as possible.

Potential crew members should not be asked about their age, disability or health, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status/civil partnership, religion, or pregnancy. Production teams only need ask for this kind of personal information before an offer is made if they are intrinsic to a role, e.g. asking about disability if a task that is central to the role can't be done with reasonable adjustments. An exception is made when asking for pronouns, provided they are asked of everyone interviewed for the crew.

It should be made clear in production calls if the show contains any potentially distressing themes. The director, producer and production manager should ensure that they are aware of the requirements of all the roles that they are advertising for. There are role guides available on the TAFF website, and the TAFF role advisors will be able to provide more information.

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Before committing to a position on a team, production crew members should be informed of the specific role requirements of the position, and how they deviate from the general descriptions given on the TAFF website.

Production teams, wherever possible, should take on assistants in as many departments as they can. This can reduce the workload of designers and increases the number of capable designers and technicians across Oxford theatre. Designers should not be left to find their own assistants. When making calls for assistants, the roles should be described even more specifically, with a clear description of the time commitment involved.

Assistants should be given as many opportunities as possible, without going beyond the commitment they are happy to make. TAFF members should make an effort to share their knowledge and experience with others.

As well as production teams advertising positions for assistants, they should be open to people seeking low commitment or assistant positions, to help as many people as possible gain experience.

Time, Planning & Breaks

Reasonable consideration should always be given to the cost in time and energy of the crew. Production teams must consider that different university subjects may change students' autonomy over their schedule. Is what you're asking reasonable within the framework of academic student life?

Ample time should be given to those who have identified relevant access needs.

Setting a plan or agenda for meetings and properly structuring technical rehearsals will ensure that individuals are not expected for more time than is necessary. Meetings are most efficient when they are actively chaired and have specific aims. In order to prevent burnout, TAFF Executive Committee and TAFF Committee meetings must have a break of at least 10 consecutive minutes every hour and may not last more than 120 minutes in total.

The planning of meetings, get-ins and technical rehearsals should be done well in advance, and be considerate to the time costs for all members of the team. A good technique for effective planning is to add 'buffer times' to all your estimated timeframes, so that it isn't an unpleasant surprise when something takes longer than it should – for example, Microsoft adds 30-50% onto their predictions.

It is immensely undesirable for anyone to be working (including packing up and storing any equipment) past midnight. Tech rehearsals should be organised, with enough resources and assistance in place to minimise the possibility of this happening.

It is similarly undesirable for any team member to work more than 4 hours without breaks of at least 30 minutes, and more than 8 hours in one go. This is to allow team members (where necessary) to use facilities, eat, take any medication necessary and so on. Breaks should be built into the plan for get-ins and technical rehearsals. Better planning, including dividing workload between pre-production and show week, and more evenly dividing workload across members of the production team, should reduce the necessary work hours for any individual.

If you feel like you are committing more time than you expected to your role, you should let your producer, production manager and/or team welfare contact know. Some responsibilities can almost always be shared with others.

Team members should look out for each other's welfare, including by reaching out to make sure people are taking the breaks that they need. People too often schedule breaks for others but not themselves, and reminding each other of the importance of breaks is a good way to overcome that.

Accessibility

Again, it is reminded that proper planning and breaks are included in part of making student theatre accessible. It is also reminded that production managers, producers, and team welfare contacts ensure any support and requirements are effectually in-place.

Many venues have limited space backstage and often do not provide staff, crew, and performers the same equipment (such as but not limited to: hoists, lifts, and ramps) as provided for audience members. Crew members with mobility issues may wish to contact the venue to ensure their needs can be accommodated for.

Where safe and possible, suitable space should be made to accommodate any equipment required by crew member with mobility issues. It must be ensured that any such equipment is stored safely and conveniently to the user when not in use. Any risk of a trip hazard must be minimized, and equipment must not block emergency exits when stored or in use for an extended period of time.

If requested, individual documents produced by TAFF should be available in more accessible versions on request. This may include, but is not limited to: plain text versions, large text versions, and versions with image descriptions. More guidance may be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/publishing-accessible-documents>

Money-handling

Producers should have a plan for reimbursement and should make it clear to crew and/or cast before any money is spent – the plan should include whether there is a production company card, how receipts should be submitted and how quickly people can expect to be paid back.

If any crew or cast member is to be owed more than £20, or if they are to be owed any amount of money for more than one week, the producer should ensure that someone reaches out to them individually to ask if this is ok. If the answer is no, then the crew member should never be asked to provide a reason for this.

TAFF suggests that it is inappropriate for any individual to be owed more than £100 for more than one week. It's important to bear this in mind when making decisions around funding applications, hire companies and ticketing services. Where the situation arises that someone is owed more than £100 for more than one week, steps taken could include:

- Considering whether more upfront funding could be sought, e.g. in the form of pro-rata loans.
- Asking for TAFF props and equipment fees and deposits to be invoiced to the production company, rather than an individual.
- As a last resort, asking more people to be owed smaller amounts; there should never be the expectation or assumption that someone is able or willing to be owed money, regardless of their position on the team.

If any more specific advice is needed, don't hesitate to contact the treasurer at treasurer@tabsareforflying.co.uk

Stress

Work-related stress should be considered on all risk-assessment forms and approached in a similar way to any other form of hazard. Steps should be taken to minimize the stress experienced by the crew.

Support each other! Look out for how you can help other members of the team, even outside your department, and they will look out for you. TAFF brings together a huge range of talents, and the more we can learn from each other and help each other out, the better our productions will be.

Producers and production managers especially, who frequently find themselves overworked and overcommitted, should make sure that they know where to access support, in the form of physical resources and people who can help.

Safety

General safety is important, and therefore all team members should be given access to the risk assessment and encouraged to read and follow it.

Everyone is entitled to feel safe at all times. No member should ever be made or pressured, or to feel either of these, into do things they do not wish to do. Please remember, where possible, to respect boundaries and personal space.

TAFF members should avoid working alone in theatres and workshops, especially when working with heights or potentially dangerous equipment.

TAFF members should also be aware that people are vulnerable when leaving buildings at night, and when walking down streets alone.

While the producer and welfare contact have primary responsibility to make sure team members are safe when working and when working home, but checking that others are staying safe is a good way any team member can contribute to team welfare.

Welfare Resources

Every production team should have a designated welfare contact, who team members can approach in confidence with any welfare concerns. Where possible, this individual should not be the director or the producer. All members of cast and crew should be made aware of the show's welfare contact, and meet them in person in an early production meeting/rehearsal. It is best if the welfare contact has experience of working in theatre, in order to understand the stresses involved.

Although a hierarchy can be necessary in a production team, the welfare contact should act non-hierarchically to ensure that people feel comfortable in bringing forward concerns.

The welfare contact should frequently check in with members of the production team, to minimize the amount of stress across a production, and, with permission, communicate issues to the producer and/or production manager. They should make sure that enough breaks are in place, and that planning is respectful of everyone's commitments. The cast and crew should be made aware of the TAFF Welfare Rep, who can be contacted at any time via welfare@tabsareforflying.co.uk, or anonymously through the TAFF website. Further resources (including this document) are also available on the website. Crew and cast should also feel free to contact the OUDS welfare rep with concerns via welfare.ouds@gmail.com.

If you have concerns about anything described above in your production, you should first talk to your welfare contact, then the production manager/producer/director, and then if necessary, the TAFF/OUDS welfare reps

If you would like any **more information**, or a **more accessible version** of this document, please contact welfare@tabsareforflying.co.uk