Oxford University Guidance on Drama Activities during COVID-19

Extra-curricular activity forms a hugely important component of student life at Oxford. Drama is no exception. The University is renowned for its many alumni who have gone on to lead successful careers in the performing arts, and for the high-quality work its student theatre-makers continue to produce.

The time students might spend working on a production or performance piece also has significant benefits for mental-health and wellbeing. Theatre-making is an active, creatively stimulating, and community building activity. It is a way to make friends, forge support groups, spend time outside the library, and maintain a creative mindset. The University places high importance on all of these attributes. This document does not represent an attempt to diminish the performing arts but rather to ensure they can continue safely during this period of uncertainty.

This guidance is intended to aid companies organizing or running rehearsals for shows during the Pandemic. Whilst performances should be run according to the guidance and safety measures of individual venues, rehearsals are more likely to be coordinated by companies independently. This document intends to support companies and ensure that these discretionary activities take place in a way that is risk-reduced and COVID-secure.

This set of guidelines is based on the official Government advice for the performing arts, as well as the University's own risk assessments for the performing arts. Both of these documents should be consulted by producers. Links are included below.

All guidance is, to some extent, subject to discretion. However, the greatest effort should be made to apply all points of this advice. Be aware that the performing arts remain a high-risk activity and should be treated as such. This is not just a matter of institutional obligation but also social responsibility: to students, to the University, and to the wider public.

Where we find that these rules are not obeyed, companies will be penalized. If you encounter difficulties enforcing any of this advice, do not hesitate to contact the University Drama Officer (drama.officer@admin.ox.ac.uk).

Whilst these guidelines will help to make a rehearsals COVID-secure, in some cases they will contradict the policy applied to a specific building or area. For example different colleges in Oxford are likely to adopt differing policies on social-distancing and appropriate behavior during the pandemic. This may affect who is allowed on premises or how certain spaces can be used. Producers should make time to consider the guidance of specific venues and

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authorities. Their advice must take precedence even though in some cases it may be more strict and far reaching than what is laid out in this document.

Government advice for the performing arts:
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts#arts-4-1

University main-page for Coronavirus advice: https://www.ox.ac.uk/coronavirus
1. Organising Companies

1.1 COVID-19 Officers

- All companies should appoint a ‘COVID-19 Officer’.
- Ideally, this will be a member of company who already holds a leadership position and interacts with both cast and crew e.g. producer or assistant producer.
  - The position’s tasks may be delegated, but responsibility still falls to the officer and they must remain the official point of contact concerning COVID-19 regulations.

- The name and contact details of the appointed officer should be given to all cast and crew members.
- It is the responsibility of the COVID-19 Officer to:
  - Ensure all company activity adheres to UK government guidelines and UK law, as well as the additional regulations from the University, OUDS and specific rehearsal/performance venues.
  - Make sure that all company members understand the guidelines
  - Be the point of contact for cast and crew (or any such related persons) should an issue arise, compliance be broken, or case of COVID-19 occur.
  - Be the point of contact for all rehearsal and performance venues concerning guidance for preventing COVID-19 transmission.

1.2 Auditions

- No in-person auditions should take place until further notice.
- Companies must audition performers using virtual substitutes.
  - This might entail requesting self-tapes or running auditions over video-conferencing software like Teams or Zoom.
  - No auditions should take place through video-calls on any social media site or app.
- We are aware that virtual auditions raise multiple issues for both welfare and access.
- OUDS has already produced separate guidance for the use of technology in auditions, meetings and rehearsals. This guidance can be found at the link below.
  - https://f5dc3545-f75f-43da-9abf-433a5443f064.filesusr.com/ugd/fbe68c_1ef8d28a6aa3401ba94d5ad1083a397.pdf
1.3 Before Rehearsals Begin

- The COVID-19 officer should compile a list of company members
  - This should be completed after any audition results are confirmed, and before the first rehearsal.
- The list should include:
  - Name
  - College
  - Subject (including year of study, and undergrad/grad/postdoc)
  - Email address (preferably .ox.ac.uk)
  - Mobile telephone number
  - Term-time address
- The officer should make a note if multiple company members are in the same ‘household’.
- The list should be emailed to the management of your performance venues. It may also be requested by rehearsal venues for their own ‘Track and Trace’ systems.
2. Booking Rehearsals

2.1 Safety First

- We recommend that live rehearsals are held as little as possible in Michaelmas Term. This is in the interest of public health and safety.
- As we have seen over Trinity Term, online rehearsals:
  - are possible.
  - produce results of high standards.
  - carry a very low public health and safety risk.
  - are accessible to ensemble members who may be unable to attend live rehearsals due to vulnerability or international status.
- It is also possible to hold ‘hybrid rehearsals’, incorporating video-conferencing software into physical rehearsals
  - The coordination of hybrid-rehearsals may also allow a larger number of performers to be present at once, some physically and some virtually, whilst maximizing social distancing.
- When booking rehearsal venues, extra time should be allowed to set up and clear away any precautionary items e.g. floor-markers, screens

2.2 Finding Rehearsal Venues

- Many spaces within colleges or university buildings will no longer be open to hire.
  - We strongly recommend organizing a rehearsal schedule and booking rehearsal spaces in advance.
- Some colleges or specific spaces may also have stricter guidelines.
  - COVID-19 officers are responsible for:
    - Contacting the relevant venue manager and discussing what is allowed within venues and any measures already in place.
    - Including the venue manager’s suggestions in company plans.
    - Ensuring all company members respect and obey their rules, even if these are more stringent than government restrictions.

2.3 Outdoor Rehearsals

- Outdoor rehearsals provide a safer and more convenient alternative to indoor rehearsals but still involve risk,
  - Where possible, and if weather allows, all companies should host some of their rehearsals outside.
- In advance, COVID-19 officers should note:
  - Forecast weather and temperature and encourage wearing appropriate clothing to protect company members.
  - Any additional access issues imposed by outdoor space.
3. Organising Rehearsals

3.1 Risk Assessments

- All rehearsals and new venues should be prepared for with comprehensive risk assessments.
  - OUDS have generated a template risk assessment for rehearsals and performances with suggestions of what risks you may face. This can be found here:
  - Oxford SU and the University have developed support for students organising events this academic year. A comprehensive interactive resource is now available at: https://www.oxfordsu.org/support/training/socially-distanced-activities/
- COVID-officers should contact venue managers for venue-specific risk assessments that may pre-exist. These will be helpful for preparations and may flag risks that are not immediately recognizable.

3.2 Duration

- Rehearsal time should be limited so as to reduce the risk of viral transmission.
  - This is additionally to reduce the need for breaks.

3.3 The ‘Six Person Rule’

- Government guidance advises non-professional theatre-organizations to follow all normal rules on members of different households meeting.
  - Currently no more than six individuals from different households are allowed to meet at once unless in a COVID-secure venue
  - This may change as the situation develops.
- We advise companies to follow the ‘six person rule’ in all of their rehearsals.
  - This applies to both indoor and outdoor spaces.
  - The six people includes both cast and crew.
- The ‘six person rule’ will not apply to performances venues that have been deemed COVID-secure by University authorities and granted special permission to open to more than six people.

3.4 Attendance

- Company members needed for a rehearsal should be contacted in advance with the exact time and location of the rehearsal and the safety measures in place.
• Company members should be encouraged not to travel via public transport.
• They should be notified in advance of process for entering and exiting the rehearsal venue and should be encouraged to arrive on time.
• For each rehearsal, the COVID-19 officer should record:
  o the date, time, and length of the rehearsal
  o the exact location of the rehearsal,
  o a list of the company members who (physically) attended
4. During Rehearsals

4.1 Setting Up the Space

- The setting up of the rehearsal room should be carried out by the COVID-19 officer (or a single delegate chosen by the officer), wearing a face-covering, unless exempt.
- Hand sanitisation should be carried out by the officer:
  - before entering the rehearsal space if the entrance door is open.
  - after entering the rehearsal space and before touching equipment if the entrance door requires contact.
- This should be done in advance. Rehearsal spaces should be booked to allow extra time for setting up.
- Rehearsal spaces should be well ventilated, with all windows and external doors opened wherever possible.
  - Due to the nature of Michaelmas Term weather, it is recommended that ensemble members are encouraged to wear warm clothes if windows will be open.
- Social distancing should be prepared and provided for:
  - Space should be made for each company member. Each company member’s space should be at least 2 metres away from another’s.
  - This should be made clear through tape on the floor, or other markers.
  - Company members should be organised to avoid speaking face-to-face.
  - Wherever possible, company members should be placed back-to-back, back-to-side, or side-to-side.
  - Blocking should be planned in advance to remove risk of movement which might compromise social distancing.
- If possible, screens should be used to separate company members
- Clear communication or signage of toilet locations should be provided in advance.

4.3 Arrival of Company Members

- Company members should wear a face-covering, unless exempt, whilst in all university and college buildings
  - Face-coverings should only be removed when necessary for performance
- The officer should make sure that the rehearsal space can be accessed on time, preferably earlier, so as to avoid contact in waiting areas.
- If Company members do have to wait outside a rehearsal space, social distancing should be enforced in a queuing system
• This should be made clear through tape on the floor, or other markers
• Company members should sanitise their hands:
  o before entering the rehearsal space
  o after entering the rehearsal space if the entrance door requires contact.
  o The use of personal hand sanitiser, rather than communal, is recommended.
• Company members should enter the room one at a time, and proceed directly to a socially distanced space within the room as directed.
• If a company member needs to go to the toilet, they should sanitize their hands before and after.
• No rehearsal should include the playing of wind or brass instruments and singing should be avoided.

4.5 Breaks

• Breaks in rehearsals should be avoided
• Refreshments should not be provided by any company members for communal consumption.
• If breaks in rehearsals need to be taken, company members should remain socially distanced, and trips to the toilet should be staggered.

4.6 Ending Rehearsals

• Company members should leave the rehearsal space one at a time and not meet in a waiting area or outside.
• Hands should be sanitised after leaving the rehearsal space.
• All shared equipment should be disinfected by the officer before being put away.
• Door handles should also be cleaned before a room is closed and locked.

4.7 Track and Trace

• Once every company member has arrived, the COVID-19 officer should take a register of all those in attendance for their records:
  o This should include a note of those company members who have failed to attend or who are present for only a part of rehearsal.
• If a company member develops COVID-19 symptoms they should immediately go into quarantine and notify the COVID-19 officer who can use the register system to trace contact.
  o Any company members who they have interacted with within 14 days should immediately go into quarantine.
o Any venues used by the symptomatic company member or any company member they have interacted with should be notified of these developments.

o If said company member tests positive for Coronavirus, performances planned within 14 days should be cancelled to avoid transmission to audience members.

4.8 Equipment During Rehearsals

- Any costume, make-up or hairstyling necessary for rehearsals should be prepared and put-on by individual actors prior to rehearsal:
  - No make-up sets or items of costume should be shared between actors.
  - All costumes should be cleaned between uses
- The use of set and props in rehearsals should be limited to only essentials:
  - Where any such items are used, they should be sanitised between uses and before handled by a new company member.
  - Items that cannot be safely cleaned should not be used.
  - All props should be sanitised and distributed at the start of each session, and collected together and sanitised at the end in order to be stored somewhere safe.
- No scripts should be shared between any company members:
  - Where possible all company members should be provided with their own scripts in advance of rehearsal.
  - Where possible, performers should be encouraged to learn lines before rehearsals begin.
- Any cameras or technical equipment (e.g. boom mics) should have a single designated crew member handling them and surfaces should be cleaned regularly.