

Department of Media Arts

Filming with child actors policy

2017-18



Introduction

Children are a rich source of stories for film makers. The use of children and young persons under 18 in films is subject to strict legal controls and requires a licence from the local authority where the child lives. A strict departmental process on the use of children is set out below. Any student failing to follow this process will be subject to disciplinary action and any filming immediately terminated.

Involving children and young persons under 18 in productions requires a very high level of responsibility and care. At all times the welfare and wellbeing of children and young people is paramount. As a responsible film maker it is crucial that careful consideration and measures are put in place to safeguard the physical and emotional welfare and dignity of contributors under the age of 18, as well as ensuring that their involvement does not cause them to suffer unnecessary distress or anxiety.

Film makers should consider whether or not it is appropriate to involve a child in a project, not just in terms of licensing and supervision, but also in terms of content and subject matter. It may be that they aren't appropriate for a child to be involved. For example, a child's parents may agree that their child can take part in a film which implies the child was abused - not an uncommon storytelling scenario. Despite it all being 'pretend' if the film is viewed by the child's peers in the future the child may be subject to bullying. It requires considerable maturity to think through these longer term implications.

There are also very strict rules, enforceable by law, about the number of hours a child can work and the provision of chaperones etc. Local authorities also have strict guidelines about training and may require criminal record checks for members of the crew.

The following limitations apply to the use of child actors in films made by Media Arts students at Royal Holloway. These limitations apply whether the film is made as part of assessed coursework or for any other purpose.

Limitations

First Year

No use of children, be they actors or subjects, will be entertained. This is an absolute restriction.

Second and Third Years

In general the use of children will not be allowed. If a film maker can demonstrate exceptional circumstances they may be allowed to make a case for the use of children in a project. The final decision about whether or not the project progresses will rest with the Head of Department (see process below).

Postgraduates

Film makers, particularly those involved in the Producing programme, may wish to use children in their projects. This will not be the norm and the film maker will need to demonstrate compelling reasons for the involvement of children or young persons under 18.

Process

1. Any student wishing to work with children must have completed an appropriate training course. This applies to all members of a production team. The Department of Media Arts will provide annual training and monitor attendance: only those who have attended will be eligible to apply to work with child actors/subjects.
2. Initial approval must be sought from your course tutor at the concept stage for the use of a child actor. This permission must be in writing and only enables a student to initiate the process of working with a child actor. Under no circumstances should an approach be made to a child or young person prior to agreement with the department. At each subsequent stage a nominated tutor will monitor progress.
3. Casting. It is strongly recommended that an agent specialising in child actors is consulted. Not only will this make the search for a suitable young actor easier they will also be familiar with the complicated licensing process required by local authorities. The film maker/producer will need to take account of the budgetary implications of the casting/licensing process.
4. Licensing. Once a suitable young actor has been found it is the responsibility of the film maker/producer to begin the process of obtaining a child performance licence. An agent can be helpful but cannot obtain a licence. The licensing application process usually takes several weeks.
5. Scheduling. It is the responsibility of the film maker/producer to prepare a shooting schedule that takes account of the limitations on hours that a young actor can work. A representative of the local authority granting a licence has the right to visit the set at any time during production to ensure that the rules governing the use of children are being observed. They also have the right to immediately remove a child if there are concerns about their welfare.
6. Supervision of child actors. Chaperones, registered with their local authority, will be appointed by the film maker/producer for the care of children during the production process. The chaperone is acting in loco-parentis and should exercise the care which a good parent might be reasonably expected to give to a child. Chaperones are professional people and their employment will have serious cost implications for the production. The use of parents as chaperones is discouraged.
7. Students should then submit the licence, schedule and supervision arrangements to their sponsoring tutor. He/She will ensure that the correct provisions are in place and forward to the Head of Department for final approval.
8. No equipment will be issued from the location store or art department without the express approval granted in stage (7).

Implications

1. Any student found to be in breach of this process will be subject to disciplinary action:
<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/ecampus/documents/pdf/support/finalstudentdisciplinaryregulationsseptember2014.pdf>
2. Any creative work found to be in production without having followed this process will immediately be terminated. An investigation by the Head of Department (or his/her nominee) will take place and the film will not be permitted to be submitted for assessment.
3. Any creative work found to have been submitted without having followed this process will be deducted a minimum of 10 marks and an investigation will take place.

Further information:

The following resources provide much more detailed information about the use of children and young persons under 18 in filming.

The local authority covering young actors who live near Egham is Surrey County Council. They have an excellent support service and can offer guidance. Before contacting their child employment team please visit the website below.

Surrey County Council - Guidance on children and young people in employment or entertainment.
<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/childrens-social-care/support-for-young-people-and-their-families/guidance-on-children-and-young-people-in-employment-or-entertainment>

Channel 4 also offer comprehensive guidance for producers and filmmakers.
<http://www.channel4.com/producers-handbook/c4-guidelines/working-and-filming-with-under-18s-guidelines>