

## Anti-Racism at RCS: update

January 2022

### Zero Tolerance at RCS

In our Conservatoire handbooks we state that we have zero tolerance of racism. It is clear, however, that between all members of our community there is not a shared understanding of zero tolerance, which can lead to confusion when actions are seen to be taken (or not) as a consequence of allegations of racism (or other forms of aggression).

We will continue to explore and disseminate our institutional perspective on this important issue. The text below gives a broad overview of zero tolerance, developed by Senior Management.

The notion of zero tolerance can give rise to the assumption that consequences lead to mandatory punishment (for example suspension from a job, or expulsion from a course).

This in turn can lead to disappointment if an outcome of an incident is not seen to be punitive (enough). However, the statement “no racism will be tolerated” requires *action*, but does not describe a sanction or punishment. An effective action or consequence in response to an incident should have the goal of changing future behaviour.

If we establish a value that is understood and shared by the institutional community, expressed – for example – as “RCS strives to be a safe and inclusive place to work and study”, then an expected standard of behaviour arises. In other words, we can expect our staff, students and partners to uphold the value in the working environment. Zero tolerance in this context refers to this behavioural standard rather than to any punishment. It simply indicates that no violation will be tolerated. Where a violation occurs action will be taken to achieve an effective outcome and changing future behaviour *in the context of the shared value*.

Therefore not all action arising from a transgression of expected standards of behaviour will require a formal process (such as grievance, disciplinary or complaint) to achieve effective change. In other words, ‘zero tolerance’ as understood here is not expressed through (or as outcomes of) formal processes or disciplinary measures (though both may be proportionate consequences of offences) but through a basic principle of taking action when our shared values are transgressed.

To be clear, there will be circumstances where a formal process is entirely the appropriate action arising.

Maintaining zero tolerance and fulfilling our commitment to anti-racist values will not be effective if students share experiences and information with us and see or hear nothing further. Non-formal, discretionary means of action should be used where appropriate to the particular situation. After action has been taken (even where there are formal outcomes), it is appropriate for all involved parties to be informed that action has been taken, a process concluded and the matter closed. It is not appropriate for details of sanctions or actions required of an individual or group to be disclosed to others unless there is a direction to do so in the outcome of a process. Formal processes normally require confidentiality of all participants, to support individuals to disclose necessary information, and to preserve the privacy of their ‘data’:

<https://www.spsso.org.uk/sites/spsso/files/csa/principles.pdf>

Support for staff to respond appropriately to a given situation will be developed through complaint handling training as well as protocols for de-escalating and dealing with incidents, disclosures and concerns raised by students or colleagues that are not formal complaints.

For these principles to work, these values need to be shared and understood by all, and the obligation to take action in the event of behaviour that falls short of expected standards is the personal responsibility of each of us.