

1. VISION TEXT – RESPECTING BOUNDARIES AT THE RCA

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Our campus: learning together, working together, living together

As a stimulating and ground-breaking learning environment, The Royal Conservatoire Antwerp of the AP University College wants to offer a safe context where there is room to meet challenges. It educates resilient artists and forms a breeding ground for the talent of today and tomorrow. It is a people-oriented organization, in which students, teachers and staff members come first. A place in which everyone is given equal opportunities and where respect for the value, individuality and background of every person is a priority. A place with clear rules for getting on with each other. A place where staff members, teachers, and students share responsibility for the functioning of the learning environment, and together take bold action when personal safety is at stake. Where people care for each other and together discover and protect boundaries. A place where we can all learn from each other. Participation, empowerment, passion, and diversity are central to this.

Shifting boundaries – searching together for boundaries in context

Art and art education often relies on exploring and shifting boundaries. But the line between pioneering and crossing borders is not always clear-cut. We believe that the safe and productive learning environment which we envisage can only be achieved by communicating openly and respectfully with each other. It is important that we (learn to) have an open conversation in which students, teachers and staff dare to indicate when they feel uncomfortable or do not know clearly how far they can go. From the school, we encourage and facilitate these conversations.

Beyond a border?

All higher education institutions signed the Cross-Border Behaviour Charter in (year). The Charter uses a definition of cross-border behaviour that is broader than just sexual cross-border behaviour, but also advises that the problems of sexual cross-border behaviour should be specifically identified. The Charter defines sexually transgressive behaviour as any verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. The Charter states that cross-border behaviour cannot always be determined according to objective and/or legal criteria. Therefore, the subjective perception of the reporter is the starting point: if a person experiences behaviour as cross-border, it must be taken seriously.

In order to put the recommendations of this charter into practice on our campus, we make use of three tools in addition to this vision text (1): an internal code of conduct (2), a step-by-step plan (3) and an action plan (4).

In the internal code of conduct (2), we focus on the shared responsibility of everyone on our arts campus in cross-border situations, whether as a victim, perpetrator or witness. We identify a number of forms of cross-border, risky or undesirable behaviour. This list is obviously not exhaustive and can be supplemented or adapted at any time.

If someone feels that a border has been crossed, it should be immediately clear where they can turn to. Victim(s), offender(s) and witness(es) must know where and how to report in confidence and what can happen then. We give an overview of persons and bodies that can be contacted and of possible actions such as the start of a mediation process, the introduction of protective measures, the opening of disciplinary measures, the official reporting of criminal offences. It is important that the reporter is able to determine which initiatives are taken. Both the reporter and the accused must avoid stigmatisation and exclusion.

The action plan (4) formulates clear initiatives to put our vision into practice. These range from providing skills for everyone on campus, to making confidential counsellors and student representatives visible, to ways of disseminating this information.

Conclusion

This initiative is intended to inform, guide and support the entire community in the Conservatoire in dealing with borders. The plan of approach has been drawn up in dialogue with students, teachers and staff.

We are committed to constantly refining and regularly updating this initiative because we believe that dealing with boundaries correctly is crucial to our operation.