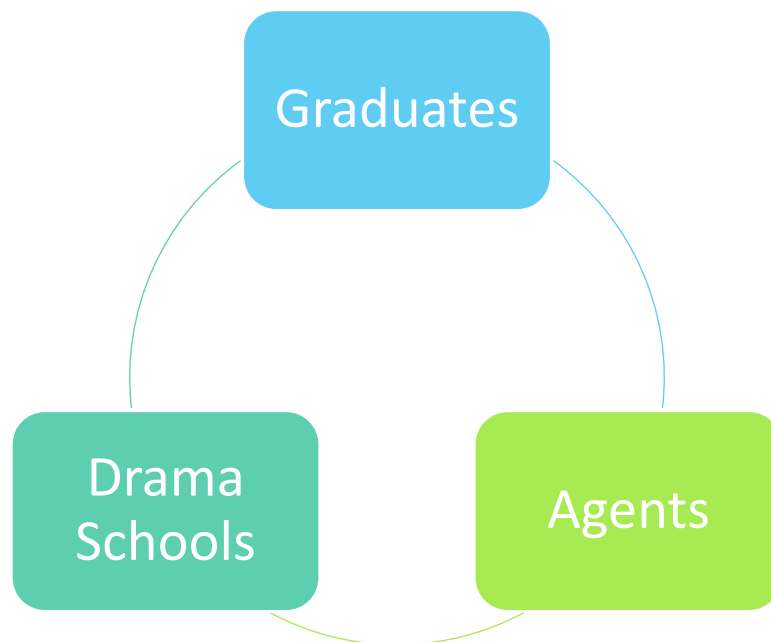




Best Practice Guidelines
For Meeting and Offering representation to New Graduates
Drama Schools – Graduates – Agents

Last updated October 2023
(reviewed annually)



The following is a set of protocols compiled by the Drama Schools Working Group of the Personal Managers' Association (PMA). Our intention is to address frequently asked questions regarding good practice when graduates make the step from drama schools to choosing an agent. This document does not attempt to be a comprehensive guide. It sets out a set of standards, based on our collective agent-experience.

The welfare of the actor is central to the PMA Code of Conduct for agents. This attitude extends to students and soon to be graduates. In the first three sections we've suggested good practice in areas where current disparate practices may not be best serving students.

The final section is specifically for graduates. We make some suggestions about what to expect in an agent meeting; and some useful things to know about working with an agent.

We'd like to thank Equity and Spotlight for their input in this document.

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1. Timeframe: From completion of training to finding representation.

Completion of training

The completion of a student’s training benefits everyone. To that end we encourage stronger co-ordination between agents and schools. We suggest a simple structure that follows the schools’ schedules.

1. Drama schools set a date when graduates are allowed to sign with agents.
2. PMA agents agree to adhere to this date.
3. Students are encouraged to abide by their individual college rules to set the point in their final year at which they are ready to sign with professional representation.

Time to meet with many agents

Meeting with agents is a unique and formative point in a student/graduate career. As agents we’d like to encourage students to meet as many different agents as they wish in order to make an informed decision when they are finally signing with an individual agent. This requires time and a reasonable communication between graduates – schools – and agents.

1. The PMA does not endorse the practice of agents making short, time-limited offers of representation e.g. let me know in 24hours or the offer is off the table. This type of offer limits students’ freedom to meet widely and could be conceived as signing under duress.
2. Drama schools are encouraged to let students know of all agents who have shown an interest.
3. Graduates be aware that taking a meeting is a choice. Research agencies who approach you, in order to make an informed decision.

Best practice around offers

When agents make offers of representation, the student should be given a reasonable timeframe to make a decision. When agents make offers of representation, the student should be given a reasonable timeframe to make a decision. We suggest that from the point a school allows a student to sign, a minimum of four weeks seems a reasonable period to allow a student to take other meetings and make a decision.

Once an agent makes an offer to a graduate, in normal circumstances that offer should not be withdrawn inside the timeframe agreed.

Graduates have an obligation to any agent who has made an offer to them to keep them informed of any decision they make on representation.

- This can be as simple as, "I have signed with somebody else."
- Or if time has elapsed, "I am still interested, please would you give me a couple more weeks and may I ask a few questions?"
- Or perhaps, 'It was great to meet you, please would you be my agent!'

All parties, graduates-schools-and agents, would be best served if there were transparency about students who have signed in advance of showcases and performances to which agents are invited.

2. First contact, arranging meetings, and self-tapes.

We recognise that meetings, deadlines and contract signing are likely to be a new process for graduates and acknowledge our duty of care in this process. The suggestions below are based on good industry practice.

A first approach should be made via the schools. Agents should contact the drama school liaison (or other assigned contact) to set up meetings with graduates.

The schools can then keep a record of all graduate meetings with agents, including date/time/venue; and any offers from agents. Graduates have an obligation to keep schools informed of any changes.

Whilst it is not uncommon for agents to make a first approach to graduates directly, agents should **never** approach graduates via social media. This is a safeguarding issue.

Graduates, if social media approaches are made, we advise that you do not respond. Instead, inform your school contact in order to make an official meeting.

Meetings should take place in a public space e.g., the agency office or a coffee shop. We do not recommend meetings in private non-professional environments such as private homes (unless there is a dedicated/official office space).

Agents should state in advance where the meeting will be held and who will be present.

A note about self-tapes

Agents, if it is part of your consideration for representation to ask graduates to self-tape for you, a few things to consider:

- Most colleges and graduates are putting together reels of their skillsets now as a legacy of lockdown. Is this sufficient?
- Making a self-tape can put a lot of pressure on the graduate on top of their school workload. This is potentially damaging if the outcome is a 'no' from the agent.

- A graduate may prioritise a request from an agent over their school work. It is not in the agent's or the graduate's interest to interrupt this important stage in talent development.

Our guidance is neither for nor against self-taping. We recommend that the agent contact the school if they want to a graduate to self-tape, as they would to arrange a meeting, to avoid the issues noted above. And if any taping is asked for, avoid attaching any time pressure to the request.

3. Pitfalls of submissions for work

Having sought legal guidance, we believe:

- It is not good practice for an agent to submit students they **do not represent** for work.
- It is not good practice to use a submission for work as an **incitement to future representation**.
- It is not good practice to submit students for work in order to create **duress** i.e. use the urgency of submission to create a time-limited offer of representation.

Submissions are not a tool generally used by agents to assess a student's worth and should not be an expectation either from agents or students. Student shows, showcases and showreels are designed to demonstrate a student's skill and potential, without obligation or confusion.

In extraordinary, career-making circumstances in which it is unequivocally beneficial to the student for an agent to make a submission, then the following steps should be observed:

Agents should provide:

- A **written agreement** to clarify their terms of business, stating that the submission is a **formative referral without obligation**. i.e. that it comes with no legally binding expectation of commission nor of future representation.
- Brief details of the submission to the school.

Agents should request:

- Written consent from the graduate.

4. Information specifically for graduates

An agent is a professional person who finds work for actors, negotiates terms for that work, and provides career guidance. Agencies vary in size and location.

What to expect in a meeting with an agent.

A meeting is an opportunity for graduates to ask questions, to feel heard and to present your work and your ambitions honestly. Similarly, an agent will want to present themselves and their work well to you. Mutual respect is key. At best you should walk away from a meeting feeling that you have presented yourself well and that you have a good sense of whether or not the agent is someone you would like to work with. If it doesn't go well, it can also be an opportunity to learn how you would like to present yourself in future meetings.

A note about submissions

It can feel exciting if an agent offers to put you forward for a role. You will have read the about the formal pitfalls earlier in this document. Please don't feel that being submitted for a role when you meet with agents is to be expected, or desirable. Many agents will be looking at the long game. They may feel that considering you for work before you have an agreement of representation between you is inappropriate. They may not want to put you under the pressure that a submission may

create, while simultaneously making one of the most important steps in your career – that of finding an agent. Submitting someone for a role is relatively simple, it is after all what agents do on a daily basis. Don't allow the promise of a submission to become a distraction from the real end game – finding the right agent for you.

The following articles from Spotlight give some insights on meetings:

<https://www.spotlight.com/news-and-advice/tips-and-advice/agent-advice-for-graduates/>

<https://www.spotlight.com/news-and-advice/tips-and-advice/finding-and-signing-an-agent/>

<https://www.spotlight.com/news-and-advice/advice-from-a-performer-agent-and-casting-director/>

What is good practice when an agent offers representation?

Agents make their money by finding your work and charging reasonable commission on the fee they negotiate. Reputable agents do not:

1. Charge a joining fee / subscription
2. Charge you for any additional services e.g. photography fees, memberships

Agents should not ask you to sign a contract which binds you to their services for a long period of time.

Agent should show you their terms of business – simple terms explaining how they work for you: finding you work, negotiating on your behalf, collecting your fee and paying you (minus their commission) within 10 working days.

Agents will ask you to provide simple head shots (head and shoulders). Agents never need any intimate or compromising photographs. Have a look at agency websites to see the sort of photos agents use of their clients.

Safeguarding. What to do when things go wrong.

Graduates should have reasonable expectations of the meeting and feel comfortable that those expectations are being met. A meeting is not a space where graduates should feel under pressure, uncomfortable or under any obligation.

If you encounter inappropriate behaviour in a meeting – this is behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable, behaviour you would not expect in any other setting - you are entitled to:

- Challenge that behaviour
- End the meeting and leave
- Report such behaviour, in the first instance to your school.

Please also see links at the end of this document to Equity's advice regarding bullying and harassment and their Safe Spaces campaign.

As agents we want you to know that bullying and abusive behaviour is neither normal nor tolerated in our industry. Challenging and reporting inappropriate behaviour – in the first instance to your school – is absolutely the right thing to do.

Safeguarding - useful links if you need help:

Equity's Safe Spaces Campaign: <https://www.equity.org.uk/advice-and-support/dignity-at-work/creating-safe-spaces>

Equity's Bullying & Harassment Guide: <https://www.equity.org.uk/advice-and-support/dignity-at-work/bullying-harassment>

Equity's Mental Health Resources: <https://www.equity.org.uk/advice-and-support/dignity-at-work/mental-health-support>

Equity's Agenda For Change: <https://www.equity.org.uk/advice-and-support/dignity-at-work/creating-safe-spaces/agenda-for-change>

Links to organisations mentioned in this document

Equity:

The UK trade union for actors and all creative practitioners <https://www.equity.org.uk>

Students and Graduates can be Equity members.

Student info is here: <https://www.equity.org.uk/at-work/students/>.

Graduate membership is offered at a 50% discount to graduates of relevant courses for a 2-year period after their graduation date.

Full benefits here: <https://www.equity.org.uk/about/member-benefits/>

Spotlight:

Spotlight connects performers with roles in theatre, television and film productions around the world. <https://www.spotlight.com/>

Tagmin:

Partners with Spotlight and is the most commonly used agency software.

<https://www.tagmin.co.uk/>

The PMA:

This document was compiled by members of the Personal Managers Association which is the leading trade body for talent agents working in film, TV and theatre. The purpose of the PMA is to help agencies work together and to maintain high industry standards. The PMA does not connect actors with agents, we strongly advise you contact agents directly. <https://thepma.com/>



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Association

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SPOTLIGHT

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