

THE PLACE THEATRE

Front of House Manual

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this manual is to collect together all items of information required by those responsible for the *Front of House* management function during any production at The Place, Bedford. Some of this information describes **mandatory requirements**, required either by the conditions of our license or by our 'house rules', as well as important information relating to **audience safety**. It is important that the designated FoH manager, and ideally also his or her deputy, be familiar with the contents of this document.

It is also requested that the **Stage Manager** and the **lighting/sound operator** be made aware of *Section 11 - Evacuation Procedure*.

2. FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER

There must be a nominated Front of House Manager for every production to liaise with the venue management team, technical team and audience in relation to audience comfort and safety.

The FoH Manager is also **responsible for ensuring compliance with legislation regarding the sale of alcohol**. The identity of the FoH Manager, together with their contact details, should be notified to Bedford Players Trust at submission of the Contract or, if not possible at that time, at least 30 days prior to the first night of performance.

3. LICENCES AND CONDITIONS

The Place is licensed under The Theatres Act, and this license carries with it the right to sell alcohol in connection with a performance. The following license conditions should be noted:

- It is a mandatory requirement that there be a minimum of **four** FoH personnel in the building whenever audiences are admitted. During the performance itself, there should be a **minimum** of **three** FoH personnel in the auditorium, and **one** in the foyer area. These personnel **must** be properly briefed in the fire evacuation procedure (*Section 11*). Briefing details are covered in more detail in *Section 10* below.
- Normal licensing rules apply (sale of alcohol only to over-18's, etc). Note that if alcohol is being served, marked glasses **must** be used, and only persons over 18 years of age may be behind the serving counter.
- Regardless of any local licensing variations, it is a condition of our lease that any bar operates only up to 11PM; if personnel remain on the premises beyond this time, extreme care must be taken to avoid nuisance or disturbance to neighbouring properties, particularly during departure or performance get-outs.

4. PERSONNEL

Common practice shows it is most appropriate to have **at least six** Front of House staff available to ensure sufficient coverage of all areas. These staff should be committed to their role and arrive within good time to be briefed and positioned before the audience start to arrive. The following role allocation has been found to work best:

- Before the show commences:
 - Two members of staff behind the bar
 - One member of staff on the box office
 - One member of staff selling programmes
 - One member of staff checking tickets at auditorium entrance
 - One member of staff in the auditorium encouraging audience to use the full range of seating.

- During the performance:
 - **At least three members** of staff in the auditorium (suggested seating positions for these staff is mentioned in Section 10).
 - **One or two members** of staff in the foyer to handle late-comers and prepare for the interval. One of these should be the Front of House Manager.

5. STORAGE AND CONSUMABLES

The Venue provides the required facilities for running a bar/coffee bar. The bar will be stocked before the opening night of your performance, as well as during the production week where necessary. The bar stock is located in the two fridges under the bar counter. A variety of glasses are provided, which can be found on the shelves also under the counter. A freezer is also provided behind the bar for hirers who wish to sell ice creams. This freezer is kept switched off when not in use, so it will need to be turned on before it is used, and emptied and turned off again with the door left open at the end of the hire. There is also a fridge in the backstage kitchen where cast, crew and any other members can keep appropriate items. This fridge must be emptied at the end of a hire.

Corkscrews, bottle openers and other items that may prove useful when running the bar are kept in the 'bar box' located in the kitchen. This box also contains two spirit measures. If you are going to serve spirits you need to discuss this with one of The Venue staff to comply with the license regulations.

If required, first aid kits can be found in the kitchen, in the green room, in the corridor behind the stage left seating block, and in the equipment room behind the control box.

The light switches for the bar and foyer lights can be found at mid-height next to the freezer behind the bar. Please ensure these are switched off at the end of each night.

6. BOX OFFICE

Before the audience arrives the blind on the box office will need to be rolled up, and the lights switched on, which is done by a switch – labeled '**Lights**' – located low down on the wall on the left hand side of the box office. The power for the box office computer will also need to be turned on, using the switch labeled '**Terminal**' also on the left hand wall. The computer then needs to be turned on; this can be done by **pressing the power button** on the top of small black computer unit located underneath the counter.

To log onto the computer, select the user profile named '**Box Office**' which will then load. The Box Office system will **start up automatically**, allowing you to input the log in information for your production – this you would have been given for your opening night.

Once all the audience members are in and the show has started, we request that you then **shut down the computer** and turn off both the 'Terminal' and 'Lights' switches. The blind then needs to be **rolled down to show the box office is closed**. It is recommended that the shelf in front of the blind is used to put out drinks that have been ordered for the interval, as it is easily accessible by the audience.

Please do not alter or tamper with the blind in any way, it has been fixed to operate in the best way by the Venue staff.

7. NOTICES AND DISPLAY BOARDS

There are two small display boards next to the box office, and to the main auditorium door for notices to the audiences. Examples include asking for mobile phones to be switched off, or warnings about strobe lighting and smoke effects. It is **essential** that notices such as these are put up for the sake of **audience safety**.

There are two large display boards on the wall opposite the bar, one next to the kitchen door, and one next to the green room door: These are there to display **publicity material** for the current production and forthcoming productions. If you wish to have publicity material displayed on these boards, please submit it to a member of The Venue staff prior to your production week. At the end of your hire, you are expected to **remove any publicity material** from your show.

There are also numerous display boards behind the bar listing the current bar prices, these are for the Front of House staff and audience to refer to.

8. FOYER SOUND SYSTEM

There is an amplifier behind the bar which enables hirers to play music in the foyer if they choose. This is linked up to the sound desk in the theatre control box and can be controlled via the volume control on the amp itself, and using the 'Foyer Feed' fader on the sound desk. If you have any issues with this system, talk to a member of The Venue staff and they will be able to help.

9. HEATING/AIR-CONDITIONING

The heating/air-conditioning in the foyer is controlled by a panel located on the far wall behind the bar. It can be turned on by pressing the power button – located in the bottom right hand corner of the panel. Whether the unit heats, cools or automatically controls the temperature can be changed using the left hand most button to cycle through each setting. The temperature the room is heated/cooled to can be adjusted using the up and down arrows, and the strength of the fan can be adjusted using the right hand most button. The green room and auditorium operate the exact same system. The panel in the green room is located to the right of the fire exit to the car park. The panel in the auditorium is located opposite the ladder to the control box in the scene dock. **Please ensure all heating/air-conditioning systems are turned off before you leave the building at the end of each night.**

10. Auditorium General

There are two **wheelchair** bays in the stage right seating block adjacent to the main entry doors, each wide enough to accommodate one wheelchair plus a chair for a companion; If needed, the

area to the right of the main foyer door could also be used for a wheelchair. Audience members who have **difficulty walking** should be seated on the third row back, level with the entrance doors.

The three seats by the main foyer door should be left empty for latecomers and also, if possible, seats to the stage right of the main block. The FoH member who is sitting by the main doors into the foyer (see next section) is responsible for seating late-comers.

It is advisable to have a FoH member in the theatre as the audience enter, to encourage the audience to sit on all sides (if the expected house is small, opening only the first entrance door can help with this). The entrance doors have internal curtains, and the FoH Manager should liaise with the Stage Manager as to whether these are to be closed, or to be left open to facilitate actor entrances, and should brief the FoH crew accordingly.

Ice creams and other food items may be taken into the auditorium at the discretion of the FoH manager. Drinks are allowed into the auditorium: However, spills should be dealt with as soon as they are noticed, and the venue management notified if the spill is likely to require extra cleaning. Broken glass should obviously be dealt with immediately – in any case, the auditorium should always be checked for spills, glasses, rubbish, etc, at the end of each performance. It is the FoH manager's duty to ensure the cleanliness of the auditorium during production week.

11. SAFETY PERSONNEL AND EVACUATION BRIEFING

During the performance itself, there should be a **minimum of three** Front of House staff members in the auditorium, at all times, seated as follows:

- One on the end of the stage left seating block, covering the double doors into the car park
- One at the end of the third or fourth row in the main seating block covering the second door into the foyer
- One in the stage right seating block covering the main door into the foyer.

It is recommended that reserved signs are placed on the seats for the Front of House staff members before any audience are let into the auditorium.

It is **crucial** that Front of House staff are briefed on the evacuation procedures in the event of a fire or other issue before the audience arrive. Briefing should be done on any given member's **first night of duty**, and every night of the production week. Ideally, the briefing should be performed by the **same Front of House staff member** each night to ensure the procedures are the same each time.

The briefing should contain the following information:

- The Front of House staff is there to ensure the **quick and safe evacuation** of audience members, **not to try and fight the fire**. Other technical personnel may be called upon to help if necessary, but their availability cannot be relied upon.
- There are **three official fire exits** from the auditorium:
 - **The double doors by the scene dock**. The Front of House staff member sat over on the

stage left seating block is responsible for holding these doors open and instructing audience members to proceed to the far end of the car park.

- The two main entrance doors to the foyer. The members of staff stationed by these doors are responsible for holding these doors open and directing the audience out the fire exit opposite the second entrance door, and out the main double doors into the building and instructing them to proceed to the end of the car park opposite the building. While doing this, members of staff should be aware that people may also be coming down the stairs outside the auditorium.
- If necessary, the up stage right door into the foyer and the upstage left door through the green room can be used to evacuate audience from the auditorium.
- There are **additional fire exits** from the building, one located in the green room, and one at the far end of the foyer past the ladies' toilet.
- If there is a disabled person in the audience, a Front of House staff member should be allocated to stay with them and help them out the building after the rest of the audience, as stated in fire regulations to be the correct procedure. If it is not possible for a staff member to stay with this person, the Front of House staff member near the main entrance door, or the Front of House Manager should return to them once all the other audience are clear from the building.
- Although the Front of House staff may wish to watch the show, they **must** be instructed to be aware of any audience members around them who may require assistance leaving the auditorium for whatever reason, as the light levels are often low during the running of a production.

12. EVACUATION PROCEDURE

Evacuation of the building will generally be triggered by the sounding of the fire alarm – although it may be triggered by direct discovery of a fire. The general procedure on hearing the fire alarm should be as follows:

- The Front of House Manager should **immediately consult with the Stage Manager**. If the alarm is not clearly a false alarm, or the cause is not known, the **evacuation procedure should be continued**
- The Stage Manager must be instructed to contact the lighting board operator to request that **all houselights and working lights are to be switched on**
- The Front of House Manager should advance onto the stage **immediately** and inform the audience that evacuation is necessary. The audience members on the stage left side of the auditorium should be instructed to leave the building via the **double doors to the car park**. The audience members on the stage right side of the auditorium should be instructed to leave the auditorium by the **main theatre doors**, and then out the **fire doors** as directed by other Front of House staff members.
- The Front of House Manager should then **supervise the evacuation process**, making sure that Front of House staff are **following their brief**, and ensuring the **safety of any disabled**

members of the audience

- At the earliest opportunity, a spare Front of House staff member, or someone else who can be relied, **must contact the fire brigade** and check the rehearsal rooms upstairs are being evacuated – this is particularly important if **no alarm is sounding**
- Once the Front of House Manager is absolutely certain that the building is clear and the fire brigade has been called, a member of the Trust should be **contacted and informed of the events**. The Front of House Manager should then wait for the fire brigade to arrive, and talk to the senior officer and explain the events as best as possible.

In some cases, the evacuation may be initiated by the Stage Manager, if there is a fire on stage or in the auditorium, for example. If this does happen, the Front of House Manager should take over supervision of the evacuation process **as soon as they are aware of the situation**. If the auditorium personnel were properly briefed, the evacuation should already be well underway.

There is a fire extinguisher in the theatre, located to the **right of the scene dock doors**, but this should only be used if there is a small fire within the auditorium. If this is the case, the fire extinguisher should be used by a member of the **stage management team**, with audience evacuation being carried out in parallel by the Front of House staff.

13. FALSE ALARM PROCEDURE

This section states the steps to be taken if the fire alarm sounds in a situation which is clearly a false alarm. Regardless of the possibility of a false alarm, there should be **no hesitation** in carrying out the evacuation procedures. However, if it is absolutely clear that the alarm sounding is false, an evacuation may not be necessary, in the event of this the following steps should be taken:

- Go to the fire alarm control panel – located on the wall through the wooden coded door in the foyer.
- Look at the indicator lights to check which zone has caused the alarm. Does this match up with your assumptions of where the alarm was activated? For example, if you think the alarm could have been activated due to use of a smoke machine, do the indicator lights show the fire alarm was set off in the performance space? The areas covered by each zone is written on a notice next to the control panel.
- If you are still sure it is a false alarm:
 - Turn the key-switch on the panel to 'Arm'
 - Press the 'Silence Alarm' button
 - Press the 'Reset' button
 - Turn the key-switch on the panel to 'Normal'
- The alarm should now be silent. Once this is done, you should immediately check all areas of the building for any signs of fire, upstairs and downstairs.
- **Contact a member of the Trust** to report the events, as it is a **legal requirement** to keep records of false alarms.

- At the next suitable moment in the performance, **announce to the audience** that the alarm sounding has been verified as false.