

The Place, Bedford

Front of House Manual

Issue 2



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this manual is to collect together, in one place, 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 licence or by our 'house rules', and there's also important information relating to **audience safety**: It's thus important that *at least* the designated FoH manager, and ideally also his or her deputy, be familiar with the contents of this document. It may also be prudent to discuss Section 10 (Evacuation Procedure) with the Stage Manager and the lighting/sound operator.

Appendix 1 of this manual presents a pre-show checklist, **and we would like to encourage the use of this checklist 'on the night', to ensure that vital actions are not forgotten.** And do please share your experience with us, telling us of omissions and errors in this manual.

1. FRONT OF HOUSE MANAGER

There must be a nominated Front of House Manager for all productions, to act as a single point of contact with both the venue management and the audience regarding all aspects of 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, must be notified to Bedford Players Trust at submission of the Booking Form or, if not possible at that time, at least 14 days prior to the 'first night'.

2. LICENSES 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 audience 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 - this is covered in more detail in Section 9 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 equipment load-out.

3. PERSONNEL

In practice, it is recommended that there be a total of **six** FoH staff available, to ensure that bar, box office, and auditorium entrances can all be staffed effectively. These staff should be called to arrive sufficiently early to be properly briefed and in position before audience arrival. The following allocation has been found to work well:

- Before the show commences:
 - Two staff behind the bar – serving drinks and taking interval orders;
 - One staff on the Box Office;
 - One staff selling programmes;
 - One staff checking tickets at the Auditorium entrance;
 - One staff inside the Auditorium, encouraging audience to use the full range of seating available, particularly the side seating.
- During the performance:
 - Three or four staff inside the Auditorium (**three** staff mandatory minimum), seated as per Section 9 of this document;
 - One or two staff in the foyer area (**one** staff mandatory minimum), to deal with late-comers and to prepare for the interval. Ideally, this should include the FoH Manager or their deputy.

4. STORAGE, EQUIPMENT, and CONSUMABLES

The theatre provides the basic serving facilities from which to run a bar or coffee bar. No bar stock, or coffee, tea, etc, is held by the theatre – it’s up to the hirer to provide their own stock as required. Note that many other hirers may have access to the Foyer, bar, and kitchen during the day – your stock should thus be stored securely at the end of each evening, as the Trust can’t be held responsible for any loss.

The primary **secure storage area** available to hirers is the under-stair cupboard: This cupboard has a combination lock (the current combination should be obtained from a Trust member immediately before the production), and although it is also used for equipment and consumable storage there should be adequate room to store the bar stock for a typical-length run. The shelves under the serving counter are also available to the hirer, but are obviously insecure. A cupboard is also usually available in the kitchen, but again is insecure.

The following **cold storage** is available to hirers:

- A freezer is available in the kitchen, for ice creams. This should be turned on 24 hours before ice creams are delivered, and cleared out and turned off at the end of the run. The hirer has exclusive use of this.
- A fridge is available behind the bar, and the hirer has exclusive use of this. This should be used only for bar products and milk;
- A second fridge is available in the kitchen: This may also be used by daytime hirers, who may store items in it overnight.

The theatre has a stock of **glasses** – at time of writing, 96 wine glasses and 96 ‘slim jims’ for beer and soft drinks, although these are obviously subject to attrition! These are stored under the stairs. In theory we also have **corkscrews and bottle openers**, but these tend to ‘walk’ – be prepared to bring your own! If you’re serving coffee, there’s an **urn** in the kitchen, but we don’t carry any stock of mugs or cups – you’ll need to supply your own.

A stock of **toilet rolls and paper hand towels** can be found in the under-stair cupboard. The hand towels come in two types, ‘folded’ and ‘centre-pull’, and a key to

undo the centre-pull towel holders can be found on the Stage Manager's key ring. Please inform a member of the Trust if the stock of toilet rolls or towels is running low. A **first-aid kit** can be found behind the bar – an additional kit is located in the lighting box if needed.

5. NOTICES and DISPLAY BOARDS

There are two display boards in the foyer – one for the 'current production', and one for the 'next production'. Hirers may put photographs, posters, etc, on the 'next production' board at any time during or after the production preceding their own. On moving into the theatre, their display should be moved to the 'this production' board.

Display boards are also provided for bar prices, and for miscellaneous posters. **Please do not fix notices of any description directly to the walls**, either with 'Blu-Tack', drawing pins, or by any other means.

6. FOYER MUSIC SYSTEM

A simple music system is installed in the Foyer, consisting of a small 'music centre' located in the sliding door cupboard in the corner of the bar counter, feeding speakers in the suspended ceiling above the bar. In addition to playing CD's in the normal manner, this system can also be used to relay any pre-show music being played in the Auditorium: Use the 'Function' button to select 'AUX', and ask the show's sound operator to put up the 'Foyer Feed' fader on the theatre sound desk.

7. HEATING

The Foyer and Performance Space are heated by the main boiler, located in the room next to the Gent's toilet; The Dressing room is heated by a separate small boiler on the wall of the Dressing Room (this boiler also heats the upstairs offices, which are let to a third party).

Generally, the heating will have been set by the Trust to run for a sensible duration. If the heating is not on, and you wish to turn it on (or, indeed, if it's on but you wish to turn it off), please do so by pressing the '**Advance**' button on the relevant boiler. **Please do not tamper with any other controls or settings.**

8. 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 can be taken into the auditorium, but no other food items. Drinks are allowed into the auditorium: However, it would be appreciated if spills could be dealt with as soon as they are noticed, and 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.

9. SAFETY PERSONNEL, and EVACUATION BRIEFING

During the performance itself, there should be **three** FoH staff in the auditorium at all times, seated as follows (looking from the stage):

- One to the left hand side of the front block of seats, covering the double door fire exit into the car park;
- One to the right hand side of the front block of seats, three or four rows back, covering the second door into the foyer;
- One in the right hand block of seats near the first door to the foyer.

It's generally advisable to place 'Reserved' signs on the relevant seats before the audience arrive.

It is vital that all FoH personnel be briefed **before audience arrival** on the actions in the event of a fire or other evacuation: On any given show, persons should be briefed when reporting for their first night of duty, even those who have acted in this capacity for previous shows. Ideally, the briefing should be given by the same person each night, preferably the FoH Manager.

The briefing should contain the following information:

- ***It must be made clear that the FoH staff are there to get the audience out quickly and safely, not to act as fire fighters.*** Other technical personnel may help if available, but their availability should not be assumed.
- There are three official fire exits from the theatre itself, each covered by specific FoH personnel in the auditorium:
 - The **double fire doors by the scene dock**, fitted with a crash-bar, leading into the rear car park. The stage left FoH member, nearest these doors, should hold the doors open and tell people leaving the building to clear to the far end of the car park;
 - The **two normal entrance doors into the Foyer**. The two FoH staff near these doors should hold them open and direct people to leave the building, either via the fire escape opposite the second of the doors (directly across the corridor), or via the main foyer front door. People leaving by either of these doors should be told to congregate in the car park opposite the building. Be aware that people may also be streaming down the stairs from the upstairs rooms.

- If required, there are additional exits from the theatre through the upstage right cast door and through the upstage left green room door. There are additional fire exits from the building in the green room, and at the far end of the foyer past the ladies' toilet. (Note also that the main double doors into the building also form part of an escape route, and thus must **not** be locked once the public has been admitted to the building.)
- If there is a disabled person in the audience: Ideally, one FoH member should be designated to wait with them and to bring them out of the building after the rest of the audience. (Fire regulations state that this is the correct procedure). Failing that, the FoH member who was covering the first entrance door, or the FoH Manager, should return to them once evacuation of other audience members is well established.
- Obviously, the FoH personnel will want to enjoy the show! But they should also remain alert to any members of the audience who may require assistance – elderly or infirm persons, for example, should they need to leave or re-enter during the show, may need assistance due to the low light levels present during the show.

10. 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 or, for example, by receipt of a bomb threat. The general procedure on hearing the fire alarm, etc, should be as follows:

- The FoH Manager should immediately consult with the Stage Manager. If the alarm or alert is not clearly a false alarm with known cause, the evacuation procedure should be continued:
- The Stage Manager should be asked to contact the lighting board operator using the stage communication system to request that all houselights and working lights be turned on;
- Immediately, the FoH Manager should advance onto the stage and announce to the audience that an evacuation is necessary; Those audience members to stage left of the auditorium centre line should be asked to exit through the double-door fire escape to the car park, and those to stage right through the normal entry doors into the foyer and then through fire escapes as directed;
- The FoH Manager should then supervise the evacuation, ensuring that the other FoH personnel are following their brief, and liaising with and ensuring the safety of any disabled members of the audience;
- At the earliest opportunity, a spare member of the FoH team (or other known reliable person) should be detailed to call the fire brigade, and another detailed to check that the upstairs rehearsal rooms are being evacuated (***especially important if no fire alarm is sounding***);
- Once the FoH Manager is certain that the building is clear and the fire brigade called, a member of the Trust should be contacted and notified of the occurrence. The FoH Manager should then await the arrival of the fire brigade, and should liaise with the senior officer, explaining the situation to the best of their knowledge.

Needless to say: The absolute priority, way above all else, is to ensure the safe and expedite clearance of the building, and thus ensure the safety of all persons.

In some cases (for example, a fire on-stage or in the auditorium), the evacuation may be initiated by the Stage Manager: In this case, the FoH Manager should take over supervision as above as soon as he/she becomes aware of the situation – if the auditorium personnel were properly briefed, the main evacuation should already be well underway.

There is a fire extinguisher in the theatre, but this should only be used if there is a very small fire in the theatre itself. If this is appropriate, the extinguisher should be used by stage management personnel, with audience evacuation continuing in parallel under the direction of the FoH personnel.

11. FALSE ALARM PROCEDURE

This section covers action in the event of the fire alarm sounding in a situation which is clearly a false alarm. ***It cannot be emphasised too highly that the presumption should always be towards evacuation.*** However, if the alarm is clearly false – due to a break-glass fire alarm button being accidentally broken, for instance – an evacuation may not be appropriate. In this case, proceed as follows:

- Go to the fire alarm control panel (in the foyer, immediately in front of the small entrance door to the left of the main entrance door);
- Look at the indicator lights to check which zone has caused the alarm. Is this in accordance with your assumptions? (For example: If you believe the alarm was caused by overzealous use of a smoke machine, does the zone alarming actually include the Performance Space?). (The areas covered by each zone are displayed on a notice next to the panel).
- If you are still happy that it's 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. Immediately, perform a thorough walk-round check of the building – upstairs and downstairs – to check for any signs of fire;
- Contact a member of the Trust to report the occurrence – it's a legal requirement that we keep written records of false alarms;
- At the next suitable moment in the performance, or at the end of the act, a brief announcement should be made to the audience to reassure them that the alarm has been verified as false.

Appendix 1 – FoH Manager’s Pre-Show Checklist

1. Ensure that you are familiar with the Evacuation Procedure in this manual. Do the Stage Manager and lighting board operator also know their roles?
2. Ensure that the car park opposite The Place is open (the current combination should be obtained from a Trust member immediately before the production);
3. Check that The Place’s own car park is reasonably clear – if a large house is expected, consider asking cast and crew to move their cars round to the back of the building (and remember – cast and crew can generally double-park, to pack in as many vehicles as possible);
4. Open the curtain over the main entrance door and clip it back over the tie-back provided, and unlock the door (Note that these doors constitute an emergency escape route, and thus must **not** be locked once the public has been admitted to the building);
5. Check that any additional padlock on the fire escape from the Auditorium into the rear car park has been removed; Check that all other fire escapes are clear;
6. Check the Auditorium for glasses, rubbish, misplaced seats, and general condition;
7. Place “Reserved” notices on seats for the mandatory FoH staff;
8. Check that the "Production in Progress" notices from the second drawer in the kitchen have been put up in the corridors upstairs;
9. Check the toilets for toilet rolls (spare ones are kept on top of the tall kitchen cupboard or under the stairs) and for paper towels – both kinds (also kept under the stairs);
10. **Before audience arrive:** Fully brief the FoH staff, allocate roles, and issue badges (These will be given to the FoH Manager by a member of the Trust); It is especially important that FoH staff in the auditorium should be easily identified;
11. Liaise with the Stage Manager as to whether the Auditorium entrance curtains are to be closed, or to be left open, and brief the FoH crew accordingly;
12. Close the curtain at the bottom of the stairs leading to the rehearsal rooms;
13. If possible, station a member of the FoH staff by the Auditorium entrance doors, to prevent audience members ‘sneaking in’ before the Auditorium is released by the Stage Manager.