

## **So you think you'd like to be an Intimacy Coordinator?**

### **What is an Intimacy Coordinator?**

An Intimacy Coordinator (IC) works across multiple departments on a production to facilitate, manage and choreograph intimate content for screen. "Intimate content" is a wide umbrella term that includes: simulated sex, nudity & partial nudity, kissing, simulated sexual assault and non-consensual action, medical scenes, childbirth, bodily functions, and more. An IC works with a rigorous consent-based practice to help to ensure the wellbeing of creatives involved in the shooting of these scenes. An IC is a creative professional who collaborates with other members of the team from pre-production through to broadcast to realise moments that best serve the characters and the story.

### **What does an Intimacy Coordinator's job entail?**

This vastly depends on the project, the scene, the team, and a host of other variables. An IC is attached to a project from start to finish as a Head of Department, and may be on set more or less frequently depending on the amount of intimate content. In any case, a great proportion of an IC's job occurs before they turn up on set. This includes: consulting with producers and casting, reading scripts and doing breakdowns of the intimate action, liaising with all relevant departments involved in these scenes, having discussions with the director(s) about what they imagine for these moments, having conversations with actors about their boundaries and expectations, rehearsals, liaising with production and legal over certain documentation, creating risk assessments and follow-up feedback forms.

When the shooting day arrives, an IC's responsibilities typically include: continued check-ins with the actors, work with the AD team to ensure the Closed Set is being maintained effectively (if applicable), ongoing collaboration with Costume regarding modesty garments and robes, choreographing or revisiting any intimate action with the actors, collaborating with the director during filming and any other professionals as relevant.

## Myth Busting!

- “The role of the IC was created in response to the Weinstein scandal and the #MeToo movement.”
  - False! The first person to work on set under the title of ‘Intimacy Coordinator’ was Alicia Rodis in the spring of 2017. The role had existed years before this in theatre, with the term ‘Intimacy Choreographer’ coined by Tonia Sina in 2006. Safe practice has existed in various forms prior to this, though it was not uniform nor under a specifically-designated role.
- “Intimacy Coordination is mainly getting to choreograph amazing sex scenes!”
  - False! A lot of the role happens before choreography and shaping intimate storytelling is more than simulated sex (e.g. kissing, familial touch, hyper-exposed content).
- “Everyone will welcome you with open arms on set!”
  - Sometimes true, but not always! The role is part of a workplace culture-shift. As a new position, there is often a need for education and further understanding of the workflow, processes, and benefits to Production. The role may involve some tough conversations and challenges to the status quo and existing structures.
- “ICs are there to stop any chance of sexual harassment!”
  - False! Everybody on set is responsible. ICs are not HR. ICs are not always present on set and only work with specific members of a Production, and sexual harassment can happen between anyone, at anytime. The Production should have a robust system for preventing sexual harassment, with clear reporting pathways, regardless of the IC. However the employment and presence of a prepared IC can mitigate risk in some situations.
- “I can be an IC and direct/act at the same time!”
  - False! When you’re an IC it’s a full commitment to the production. You can’t be an actor and IC in the same production. As a director, you hold implicit power that means you can’t also be the IC. It’s crucial that an IC is a third-party without responsibilities that clash with their ability to be as neutral as possible. Some ICs work as movement professionals, choreographers or stunt coordinators alongside Intimacy Coordination.

## **Intimacy Coordinators' Recommended Skills**

*There are certain skills that Intimacy Coordinators typically have that ensure best practice. Intimacy Coordinators having these skills allows them to engage in the work effectively.*

- Empathy
- Active listener
- Considerate
- Emotional Literacy
- An aptitude for collaboration
- Ability to hold conflict
- Creativity
- Quick problem-solving
- Self-reflective
- Ability to interrogate own prejudices and assumptions
- Ability to anticipate issues
- A comfortability working with various types of intimate content
- Ability to speak frankly about sex and bodies
- A passion for working with physical, embodied storytelling
- An enthusiasm for consent-work

## **Intimacy Coordinators' Potential Backgrounds**

*Current Intimacy Coordinators in the UK have come from a range of backgrounds, including:*

Movement

Fight/Stunt

Costume

Advocacy

Law

Safer Spaces Training

Wellbeing / Pastoral work

Adult Entertainment

Acting

Directing

Various Film/TV Crew roles (e.g. ADs, Gaffers etc.)

Whatever your background, aspiring ICs are recommended to have a previous qualification and/or recognisable experience in movement, directing and/or acting or an equivalent creative role as well as knowledge and/or experience of on-set etiquette and processes.

## **Other Pathways**

Intimacy Coordination is a niche and specific role. If you find you do not necessarily have the exact skills, experiences, interests or background to be able to work as an IC, there are other adjacent roles that may be more suited to you:

- Wellbeing Practitioner
  - This could be right for you if:
    - You are passionate about wellbeing in the creative industries in general, and not just around Intimacy
    - You are passionate about advocating for best practice but don't have experience/interest in movement, acting, directing and/or other creative roles.
  
- Access Coordinator
  - This could be right for you if:
    - You are particularly interested in advocating for actors and crew and coordinating their access needs.
    - You are interested in the pastoral side of screen production, and coordinating with multiple departments including actors, ADs, Directors and Producers
    - You have a passion for working with disabled and neurodivergent actors to work alongside an IC when filming intimate content.
  
- LGBTQ+ consultant
  - This could be right for you if:
    - You are passionate about the representation of LGBTQ+ characters and themes on screen generally, and not just around representations of queer Intimacy.
    - You have experience and interest in advocacy but not in movement, acting, directing and/or other creative roles.

- Other consultancy roles, e.g. fetish, BDSM, kink, erotic dance etc.
  - There are a range of specialist consultancy roles that can be brought into productions, sometimes working in collaboration with an IC, but also working more broadly on how these specialist topics are portrayed on screen. If you have particular experience or knowledge of a certain area and are largely interested in facilitating that type of content, these could be roles for you.

## **Working with Intimacy practice**

If you are a creative professional who is excited about the rise in Intimacy Coordination, and are looking forward to working on scenes of Intimacy in your current role, it is possible to learn about Intimacy practice without committing to training as an IC. Directors, Actors, Choreographers and others, may want to attend some introductory workshops or do some reading so they are engaged in the practice and ready to work on Intimacy with an Intimacy Coordinator, without needing to change careers into the new role. You can always create safer spaces in the role you currently inhabit.

## **How to train as an Intimacy Coordinator**

There have been barriers to providing training and a lack of training opportunities for Intimacy Coordinators in the UK over the past years. Bectu has established the Training Working Group to try to find remedies for this issue and to provide clear training pathways for potential ICs. Please watch this space.

## **Why do you need to undergo training and/or mentorship to be an IC?**

An Intimacy Coordinator is a health and safety role, with significant responsibility and liability for what happens on set during the filming of intimate scenes. It is essential that anyone walking on set in this capacity is qualified to undertake those responsibilities. There are many areas of expertise an IC needs to have, and pathways to obtaining that training are evolving and varied – the one thing the entire industry agrees on is that ICs need to be properly trained.

When someone who isn't properly trained works on set as an IC they put themselves at risk, as well as the actors and the production. By doing so, they also jeopardize the integrity and reputation of the role of the IC in the wider industry, leading to misconceptions about the work and a loss of respect for the role.

The Bectu Intimacy Coordinator Registry (beginning 2023) “is designed to promote high safety standards and industry-wide competence” regarding Intimacy work. “There are a number of experience and qualification requirements” that ICs must have in order to be accepted onto the Registry.

## **Preparation for training**

*Before joining a training programme or mentorship scheme, you can begin self-led study and other preparation to put yourself in the best position possible to be accepted onto one of these pathways and to ready yourself for training as an Intimacy Coordinator:*

- Improve your understanding of:
  - Contracts, Union Agreements & Guidelines
  - UK law & resources on consent and harassment
  - Power dynamics
  - Trauma Awareness or Trauma-Informed Practice
  
- Undertake training in all the following areas (e.g. via providers such as [High Speed Training](#) & [iHasco](#)):
  - Mental Health First Aid
  - Creative Industries Safety Passport
  - Anti-Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Bullying
  - Gender Identity and LGBTQIA+ Awareness
  - Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity
  - Conflict Resolution / Mediation
  - Bystander Intervention
  - Safeguarding Training for Working with Minors (e.g. NSPCC, PART).
  
- Courses to supplement your existing knowledge and diversify your understanding of:
  - Directing
  - Acting
  - Movement
  - Camera
  - Filmmaking
  - Dramaturgy
  
- Intro to Intimacy Coordination fundamentals / online courses

## **Basic expectations from training providers**

Your course should include the following:

- Opportunities for engagement with various Intimacy practitioners and related professionals. ICs have many different skills and backgrounds, so courses should embrace that there is no singular methodology or practice when it comes to Intimacy Coordination.
- Courses should charge reasonable fees for training undertaken, or should ideally offer flexible payment options (e.g. installments). Financing should be transparent.
- Courses should have a curriculum that is clearly sent out in advance.
- Courses and/or training providers should have testimonials.
- Courses should have a clear end-point, so trainees can see their roadmap for finishing their training.

Reach out to Bectu if you have concerns.