

# Guidelines on Personal Relationships

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## 1. Introduction

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- 1.1 This guidance is intended for College purposes. The University has a separate but similar policy. There may be occasions where there may be some overlap in jurisdiction, in which case the Head of Department (or equivalent) in the University would need to liaise with the Senior Tutor.
- 1.2 The policy concerning consensual personal relationships between staff and students is intended to discourage such relationships of a sexual or other intimate nature occurring where a member of staff has a professional responsibility for a student and to ensure that, in the event that a relationship arises in such circumstances, arrangements are put in place to protect both parties from any perceptions of preferential or other inequitable treatment.
- 1.3 This guidance is designed to help staff and students in determining how the policy should be implemented and provides further information and details about sources of support. It should be read in conjunction with the policy and does not form part of employees' terms and conditions of employment.
- 1.4 A personal relationship of a sexual or other intimate nature between a student and a member of staff with academic, pastoral or administrative responsibilities towards that student can undermine the relationship of trust and confidence which is intrinsic to interactions between staff and students, and may give rise to an actual or apparent conflict of interest, risk of favouritism, or abuse of authority.
- 1.5 Members of staff should act with integrity and not place themselves in a position of actual or apparent conflict. Should such a situation arise, the requirements for disclosing the relationship set out in the policy, and the guidance that follows, will apply.
- 1.6 Members of staff should disclose any conflict of interests, involving personal relationships (e.g. a member of staff's child applying for admission to the College), to the Senior Tutor or the Vice-Master if this concerns the Senior Tutor.

## 2. Related College policies and procedures

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- 2.1 Policy on Dignity and Respect
- 2.2 Students Complaints Procedure
- 2.3 Procedure for Handling Student Cases of Harassment or Sexual Misconduct
- 2.4 Safeguarding Policy: Children and Vulnerable Adults
- 2.5 Staff disciplinary procedures
- 2.6 Student disciplinary procedures

### 3. Definitions

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- 3.1 **Student:** The policy defines a student as any person pursuing a course of study leading to the award of a degree, diploma, or certificate of the University, any visiting or exchange students, applicants and offer holders. Where graduate students have teaching or teaching-related (teaching, supervision and/or assessment) duties, this policy applies to them as if they were a member of staff but only in respect of their teaching or teaching-related activities.
- 3.2 **Staff:** The policy defines a staff member as including any person who is engaged by the College as an employee or worker and/or who holds a College office or post, as well as any person to whom the College makes available any of the privileges or facilities normally afforded to its employees. This definition will include academic visitors and other classes of temporary, honorary and volunteer staff. It also applies to graduate students but only when teaching or undertaking teaching-related duties whether paid or unpaid.
- 3.3 **Professional Connection:** The policy defines a professional connection as meaning any arrangement where a person in his or her capacity as a member of staff has any direct or indirect academic, pastoral or administrative responsibility for a student, including for acting as a research supervisor for a graduate research student, tutoring, teaching, selecting or assessing the student.
- 3.4 **Personal Relationship:** The policy defines a personal relationship as meaning any association, however brief, of a sexual or other intimate nature, either in person or remotely (for example, via social media, email or text messaging). It applies irrespective of sexual orientation, gender, race, and religion.

### 4. Disclosure

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- 4.1 These guidelines are primarily intended to address the situation where there is real or perceived imbalance of power between two individuals. These guidelines should be read with this in mind.
- 4.2 A member of staff must make a disclosure where there is, or has been, a personal relationship, or where a personal relationship arises, between a member of staff and a student, with whom that member of staff also has a professional connection.
- 4.3 The disclosure must be made to the Senior Tutor or, if the member of staff would prefer, to Head of HR, who will speak to the Senior Tutor. If the disclosure is made to the Senior Tutor and it concerns a non-academic member of staff, the Senior Tutor shall notify the relevant Head of Department within the College. Likewise, if the disclosure is made to the Head of HR about a member of the academic staff, the Head of HR shall notify the Senior Tutor.
- 4.4 The disclosure can be made orally or in writing (including by email). If it is provided orally, it is recommended that the Senior Tutor respond in writing to confirm the disclosure. In any case the steps taken to address the matter must be discussed and followed up in writing to the member of staff (see 5 below).
- 4.5 If a member of staff is unsure whether a relationship with a student should be disclosed under this policy, the member of staff should disclose it.
- 4.6 In the event that any member of staff is, or becomes, aware of a relationship which ought to be, but has not been, disclosed under the policy, they are encouraged to draw the relationship to the attention of the Senior Tutor or (if the member of staff would prefer) to the Head of HR.

## 5. Putting in place alternative arrangements

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- 5.1 Following disclosure, the Senior Tutor will ensure that the student is aware of the disclosure and that alternative arrangements are put in place to avoid the member of staff having any professional connection with the student.
- 5.2 In practice this may involve:
- consulting with the member of staff and the student to identify any impact their relationship may have within the College;
  - facilitating the re-organisation of duties to minimise professional contact and ensure the member of staff is not tutoring, acting as a research supervisor, assessing or examining, providing pastoral care, or professionally responsible for administering activities in which the student is involved;
  - ensuring that appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential effect of the relationship on other staff and/or students;
  - ending or modifying the professional connection between the parties to ensure there is no threat to the integrity of either party;
  - withdrawing from writing references and recommendations for the student in question.
- 5.3 In all circumstances the Senior Tutor will deal with the situation in a manner that protects the dignity and privacy of all parties, and seek to ensure that the student is neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. Those involved will be expected to comply with any decision or action.
- 5.4 There may be exceptional circumstances where it is difficult or impossible to avoid some involvement by the member of staff in the student's study, for example where the student is conducting research in a specialised area and/or where no alternative tutor or supervisor is available. In these circumstances, the Senior Tutor should consider whether it would be appropriate to engage a co-supervisor or external supervisor, in order to ensure that the member of staff does not have sole responsibility for supervising the student's work or for taking decisions that affect the student.
- 5.5 The Senior Tutor may seek advice on a confidential basis from the Head of HR.

## 6. Advice to students

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- 6.1 Students are advised not to enter into personal relationships with a member of University or College staff with any responsibility for them. If such a close personal or intimate relationship develops, and the student is not sure that a member of staff has disclosed it, they are encouraged independently to advise the Senior Tutor or their Tutor.
- 6.2 If the disclosure is made to the Tutor, the Tutor is responsible for reporting the matter to the Senior Tutor to ensure that appropriate action is taken which may involve liaising with a Head of Department (or equivalent) in the University. Alternative arrangements will be put in place to minimise the potential effect of the relationship on other staff and/or students as mentioned in Section 5 above.

## 7. Non-consensual relationships

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If any student finds themselves in receipt of unwanted or inappropriate behaviour or involved in a relationship that they do not consider to be truly consensual, or if they consider that they have been adversely affected by a misuse of power, authority, or conflict of interest, they should refer to the College's Procedure for Handling Student Cases of Harassment or Sexual Misconduct.

## 8. Further sources of advice

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- 8.1 Any member of staff or student who has questions about the policy or guidance and its application should discuss them with their Senior Tutor.
- 8.2 Additional advice for staff may be sought from HR, or from a trade union.
- 8.3 Additional support for students may be sought from their College Tutor or the College Mental Health Advisor.

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