

## **ORIEL COLLEGE**

### **Policy on Personal Relationships at Work**

#### **1. Introduction**

This policy forms part of the College's equality and diversity policy framework, which is made up of a number of documents that set out our formal policy in this area. These are:

- Equality Policy
- Bullying and harassment policy
- Transgender policy
- Sexual harassment policy
- Personal relationships policy.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

#### **2. Purpose and Scope**

This policy applies to all College staff, whether academic, non-academic, permanent, casual or contracting. This document sets out the policy on personal relationships within the College.

Whilst most social and personal relationships need not present a difficulty, it is recognised that there will be particular circumstances where there will be a need for a member of staff to withdraw from certain decisions or from undertaking certain roles, in order to protect themselves and the College from possible criticism of unfair bias. In addition, members of staff who have any responsibility for students have an obligation to keep their relationship with those students strictly professional, so as to respect the trust placed in them and in order to ensure that conflicts of interest do not arise.

Relationships are classified as follows:

- A family relationship
- A business/commercial/financial relationship
- A romantic/sexual relationship.

#### **3. Relationships between Students and Academic Staff**

The policy prohibits academic staff from engaging in romantic or sexual relationships with students for whom they hold any teaching, pastoral, or other professional responsibility. This includes relationships that takes place on College premises and elsewhere. It covers face-to-face interactions, as well as those which take place through other media such as emails, letters, telephone conversations, social networking sites, and text messages where they are of a romantic or sexual nature.

The closeness of the academic relationship between students and staff who have teaching, pastoral, or other professional responsibility may cause the boundaries between the personal and the professional to become blurred. Staff need to be aware of the implications of the imbalance of

power and authority in such relationships. It places students in a position of vulnerability, which must not be taken advantage of, whether deliberately or inadvertently. A student's desire to impress, or to not give offence, might give rise to misunderstandings about the nature of the relationship. Unwanted sexual or romantic approaches can have a devastating effect on students, causing them to lose trust in the College and lose confidence in themselves. Any student who is concerned that they have experienced sexual harassment should consult the College's harassment and bullying policy, which lists sources of support. You can find this here:

[https://www.oriel.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/policy\\_and\\_procedure\\_on\\_bullying\\_and\\_harassment.pdf](https://www.oriel.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/policy_and_procedure_on_bullying_and_harassment.pdf)

It is College policy that it is always inappropriate for a member of staff to have a romantic or sexual relationship with any student for whom they have teaching, professional or pastoral responsibility, irrespective of whether the student appeared to give consent, gave consent or even instigated the behaviour.

Should a staff member in a position of teaching, professional or pastoral responsibility for a student become aware that the student's behaviour suggests the possibility of romantic or sexual interest in the staff member, then it is the responsibility of such staff to draw this to the attention of the Senior Tutor or Provost, so that a replacement staff member can be found for the student. This prevents the original staff member from becoming vulnerable. If the member of staff is unsure whether or not a student's behaviour should be disclosed, they should seek advice from the Senior Tutor or Provost.

Any member of staff found to be engaging in an undisclosed romantic or sexual relationship with a student for whom they have teaching, professional or pastoral responsibility, even with consent, will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

#### **4. Relationships between Managers and Staff**

If two people who are or were in a romantic relationship were to work together in circumstances where one had managerial or supervisory responsibility over the other a number of difficulties could arise. These include:

- Conflicts of interest – the manager may for example find it difficult to carry out an objective performance assessment;
- Perceived or actual favouritism in relation to granting leave, allocation of overtime and approval of expenses claims;
- Perceived or actual victimisation if the relationship breaks down; and
- The risk of inadvertent or deliberate disclosure of confidential information.

To avoid a situation where a member of staff has managerial authority over another with whom he/she is having a close personal relationship, the College reserves the right to elect to transfer one or both employees involved in a relationship to a role in a different department in the College. In these circumstances, the College would consult both members of staff and seek to reach a satisfactory agreement regarding the transfer of one or both of them.

In such a situation, if it is not possible to transfer at least one of the members of staff, for example if vacancies do not exist, or if an employee refuses to transfer, the College reserves the right to dismiss

one or both employees, with notice in accordance with the employment contract. Dismissal would however only be undertaken as a last resort in circumstances where no other course of action was reasonably open to the College.

## **5. Relationships between Staff, a Client, Contractor or a Supplier**

If a member of staff is employed within a role which allows him/her authority over a client, contractor or supplier the principles of this policy will apply. If the member of staff has the authority to decide to whom to award contracts, the relationship must be declared to their manager. In these circumstances the College reserves the right to transfer, or as a last resort dismiss the member of staff following consultation with him/her.

## **6. Relationships with other External members of the College**

There may be circumstances where a member of staff, either academic or non-academic is in a relationship with a person who is involved as an external advisor or benefactor of the College.

Examples could include:

- Advisors who attend or chair committees
- Alumni of the College
- Donors
- Visiting Fellows.

These relationships should also be declared so that the College can take steps to ensure that there is no risk to the integrity of committee decisions or to any other College operations.

## **7. Relationships Between Non-Academic Staff and Students**

Non-academic members of staff who enter into a romantic relationship with a student must declare this to the College through their line manager. The line manager should in turn report this to the Senior Tutor. This should be recorded on the employee's personal file.

## **8. Obligation to report a relationship**

There is a clear obligation for staff to inform their line manager if they enter a relationship which could compromise day to day operations in the college, put that member of staff in a vulnerable position e.g. relationships with suppliers, or has the potential to adversely impact other members of staff.

Additionally, in the case of staff–student relationships, it is the College, and not the member of staff, who should assess whether that member of staff has teaching, pastoral or other professional responsibilities for the student. Any member of staff who enters into a relationship with a student of the college must declare that relationship to their line manager or, in the case of academic staff, the senior tutor or the HR manager, so that that action can be taken to ensure that the staff member has no responsibility for the student and to mitigate any unintended consequences.

The senior tutor, with advice from the HR manager, will consult with the staff member and the student to identify any impact that the relationship may have within the College. They will facilitate the re-organisation of duties to ensure that the member of staff is not tutoring, supervising, assessing, providing pastoral care, or professionally responsible for administering activities in which

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the student is involved. They will also ensure that appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential effect of the relationship on other staff and/or students.

A declaration of a relationship will, so far as possible and subject to the specific provisions of this policy, be treated in confidence, and every effort will be made to ensure that it does not disadvantage either party.

In circumstances where a relationship is discovered that should have been disclosed an investigation into this will be carried out. The outcome of that investigation might include a recommendation to proceed to a disciplinary hearing.

## **9. Guidance for students and the need for disclosure**

The College advises students not to enter into any relationship with a member of College staff with any responsibility for them, as it may lead the staff member to compromise the integrity of their professional relationship. If such a relationship develops, and the student is not sure that a member of staff has disclosed their relationship, they are encouraged to independently advise the Senior Tutor or Tutor for Graduates.

## **10. Conduct**

Any member of staff who is involved in a close relationship with a colleague, client, supplier, student or contractor must not allow that relationship to influence their conduct while at work. Intimate behaviour during work time, for example kissing, touching or holding hands is expressly prohibited. This rule applies during all working time, whether at the normal workplace, or elsewhere. Any blatant or persistent breach of this rule will be regarded as a serious disciplinary offence leading to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.