



Oriel College

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Personal Relationships at Work Policy

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A. 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, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy
- Bullying and harassment Policy and Procedure
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- Personal relationships at work policy.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time, though it should be reviewed at least every three years.

B. Purpose and Scope

This document sets out the policy on personal relationships within the College. The purpose of this policy is to:

- Set out the expectations and obligations of College staff and students with respect to personal relationships;
- Ensure that sufficient safeguards exist to prevent real, potential or perceived abuses of power or conflict, preferential/ detrimental treatment and sexual misconduct;
- Provide a safe, positive and supportive environment for staff and students.

This policy applies to all College staff, whether academic, non-academic, permanent, casual or contracted.

The College recognises the value of positive professional relationships. Such relationships are central to students' educational development and welfare and to positive working relationships between staff. However, the College notes that sexual or romantic relationships between staff/ students and staff/ staff where there is a power/ responsibility imbalance can cause significant problems (discussed below), including emotional or practical consequences, actual or perceived unfair bias or actual or perceived favouritism.

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.

C. 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 policy also prohibits academic staff from engaging in relationships with students for whom they have responsibility that results in the student becoming financially dependent on the member of staff.

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. This is available under the Policies and Procedures section of the college website located here: <https://www.oriel.ox.ac.uk/official-information-and-foi/>.

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, pastoral or financial 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, pastoral or other 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.

D. 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.

E. 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.

F. 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.

G. 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.

H. 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.

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 Head of HR, 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. 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.

The Senior Tutor, with advice from the Head of HR, 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 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.

I. 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 seek advice from the Senior Tutor (senior.tutor@oriel.ox.ac.uk) or Tutor for Graduates (tutor.graduates@oriel.ox.ac.uk).

J. 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.

K. References

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following college policies:

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy
- Bullying and harassment Policy and Procedure
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- Conflicts of Interest Policy and Procedures
- Disciplinary Policy
- Safeguarding Policy

L. Version Control Table

Version	Owner	Agreed by House Committee	Agreed by Governing Body	Reason for amendment	Amended by	Next review	Further notes
v.1	Head of HR	24 October 2018 (by General Purposes Committee)	7 November 2018	This is the original version.	Head of HR and Senior Dean	TBC	
v.2	Head of HR	28 January 2026	11 February 2026	Updated guidance from Conference of Colleges	Governance Officer	October 2028	This policy was taken to House on 19 November 2025. However, in light of the amendments suggested, a decision on the policy was deferred until the January meeting.

