

Girton College

Staff & Student Relationship Policy

Policy concerning personal relationships between staff and students

The College subscribes to the University of Cambridge's Staff and Students Relationship Policy: [Staff and Students Relationship Policy | Human Resources](#)

In the College context, disclosures are expected to be made by the member of staff in question to the Senior Tutor, Bursar or Head of People & Culture, who will collaborate to ensure any disclosures are managed appropriately. For the purposes of clause 5.8 of the University Policy, the College defines a 'member of staff' as anyone acting in an equivalent role within the College, including those engaged solely by the College and not covered by the University Policy under its clause 3.2.

Students wishing to report the behaviour of a College staff member, Fellow, or other College-related individual may do so under the College's Procedure for Dealing with Comments, Suggestions and Complaints from Students (document B1).

July 2026

Please note: this document links to the University of Cambridge's current Staff and Students Relationship Policy above. Girton College's own policy (this document) is currently under review and may be updated in due course."

Appendix 1 University of Cambridge — Staff and Students Relationship Policy

Reproduced from the University of Cambridge policy in force at the date of this document (version dated 1 August 2025). The current version can always be found at: [Staff and Students Relationship Policy | Human Resources](#)

1. Statement of Policy

1.1 Positive professional relationships between members of staff and students are an essential part of supporting our students' educational development and ensuring their welfare whilst at the University. However, when relationships between staff and students become personal in nature, they may lead to actual or perceived imbalances of power or authority, accusations of bias or exploitation, and questions about the nature of consent. This can undermine trust and confidence in the academic process, impair academic progress and negatively affect the welfare of the student.

1.2 To provide a positive, safe and supportive learning and working environment, this Policy sets out the University's position on personal relationships between staff and students, where these are of an intimate or close personal nature.

1.3 The Policy applies to all staff, but particular provisions are set out for those members of staff who have direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, in relation to a student (referred to as Relevant staff members).

1.4 Relevant staff members are prohibited from pursuing or entering into an intimate relationship with any student for whom they have any direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities. Failure to comply with this Policy will be considered as a disciplinary matter.

1.5 Relevant staff members are strongly discouraged from entering into a close personal relationship with any such student for whom they have any direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities. When such relationships do occur, they must be declared so that an assessment can be made of any potential conflict of interest and influence. Failure to comply with this Policy will be considered as a disciplinary matter.

1.6 Relationships that are coercive, exploitative or sexualised are always unacceptable and must not occur. All staff have a duty to behave appropriately towards students, to act with integrity in their work and to avoid placing themselves in positions of actual or perceived conflict.

1.7 Where an intimate or close personal relationship exists when a member of staff is appointed or when a student enrolls at the University and the member of staff would ordinarily be a Relevant staff member to a student, it is the responsibility of the member

of staff to inform their Head of Institution (or nominated representative), in order that alternative arrangements can be made. Please refer to Section 6 of the Policy.

1.8 This Policy concerns consensual relationships between members of staff and students; non-consensual behaviour (or allegations of behaviour where consent has been put into doubt) is covered at section 12 and in the University's Dignity at Work Policy.

1.9 This Policy is accompanied by guidance to support the implementation of the Policy (Appendix 2).

1.10 This policy is not contractual and may be amended from time to time, in light of changes in legislation or operational requirements.

2. Purpose of this Policy

2.1 This Policy seeks to protect members of staff and students from misconduct and allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest by providing a framework of guidance and regulations and by ensuring appropriate safeguards and processes are in place to prevent abuses of power and sexual misconduct.

2.2 In particular, the Policy aims to prevent intentional or unintentional conflicts of interest or abuses of power that may occur within seemingly consensual relationships between students and Relevant staff members. Students could potentially experience the negative effects of an inherent power imbalance, even where a Relevant staff member does not seek to abuse their power.

2.3 This policy forms part of the University's single comprehensive source of information (SCSI), which brings together information for current and prospective students and staff about how the University prevents and responds to harassment and sexual misconduct.

3. Who is this Policy for?

3.1 This Policy applies to all members of University staff as defined in Section 5.

3.2 This Policy does not apply to employees and workers solely engaged by the Colleges, who should refer to their College's policies and procedures on relationships between staff and students. College employees and workers are expected, however, to behave in a manner that is consistent with the University Code of Behaviour if undertaking their work or services specifically in the University environment.

3.3 This Policy does not apply to students. Their attention, however, is drawn to the Policy and the terms and requirements placed on members of staff as defined above.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 All members of staff (as defined in Section 5) must act in compliance with this Policy.

4.2 Staff responsible for HR in their area are responsible for providing advice and support in accordance with this Policy.

4.3 The HR Business Partnering Team are responsible for providing advice and support to institutions about this Policy.

4.4 Dignity at Work Contacts are a group of trained volunteers from across the University responsible for providing support to members of staff who have experienced or been accused of alleged inappropriate behaviour.

4.5 All roles involved in providing direct guidance and support to members of staff and students are responsible for ensuring that information is handled confidentially.

4.6 The Human Resources Division is responsible for ensuring that this Policy is maintained and that appropriate explanatory guidance is provided to support its use.

4.7 Heads of Institutions are responsible for ensuring that members of staff within their institutions are made aware of this Policy; ensuring that up-to-date records of declarations and conflicts of interests are maintained; and for determining and recording how to manage each.

4.8 The Head of School/Non-school Institution, with support from the relevant HR Business Partnering Team, will periodically review disclosures within the institution relating to the Policy and any resulting protective actions and measures taken.

5. Definitions

5.1 Abuse of power is where a position of power or authority is used in an unacceptable manner. This can take various forms and may include, but is not limited to, grooming, manipulation, coercion and pressurising others to engage in conduct they do not feel comfortable with.

5.2 Adult at risk is someone aged 18 years or over who is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; who is unable to protect themselves because of illness, disability or age; and who is in need of care and support of community services.

5.3 Close personal relationship excludes intimate relationships, but means a relationship where the nature, content, involvement and/or frequency of interactions and/or communications between a staff member and a student transgress the boundaries of professional conduct or may be reasonably perceived to do so.

5.4 Grooming is when a person builds a relationship with a child, young person or an adult who is at risk so they can abuse them and manipulate them into doing things. The abuse is usually sexual or financial, but it can also include other illegal acts.

5.5 Head of Institution includes Heads of Departments and of other academic Institutions, Chairs of Faculty Boards not divided into Departments, and the administrative Heads of Institutions.

5.6 Institution means all academic and academic-related departments, including administrative units, libraries, museums, and any other person sections or units of the University.

5.7 Intimate relationship means a consensual relationship that involves one or more of the following elements: (i) physical intimacy including isolated or repeated sexual activity; or (ii) romantic or emotional intimacy, which may be conducted in person and/or online and/or via electronic or any other form of communication.

5.8 Member of staff includes any person working within the University under a formal contract of employment or as a casual worker or any person to whom the University offers any of the privileges or facilities normally available to its employees (such as visiting academics) or any individual working within the University under a contract for services and/or in a self-employed capacity.

5.9 Relevant staff member means a member of staff who has direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, in relation to that student.

5.10 Responsibility for a student is defined widely and includes any teaching, professional, pastoral or administrative responsibility or authority over a student, whether temporary or permanent, whether formally conferred on or voluntarily assumed by the staff member and whether the responsibility arises in a University or a college context.

5.11 For the purposes of this Policy, sexual misconduct means any unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature and includes but is not limited to: (i) sexual harassment; (ii) sexual assault; and (iii) rape.

5.12 Where conduct does not fall squarely within the examples in the paragraph above, that conduct may still amount to sexual misconduct under this definition where it is unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature.

5.13 Student includes any person currently studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification, or on any course arranged by or through the collegiate University, including visiting and exchange students, applicants, and offer-holders.

6. Terms and Disclosure

6.1 With effect from the Policy commencement date: (i) Relevant staff members are prohibited from pursuing or entering into an intimate relationship with any student — failure to comply will be considered a disciplinary matter; (ii) Relevant staff members are strongly discouraged from having any close personal relationship with any student and must declare if such a relationship has developed, is developing or appears likely to develop — a failure to declare will be considered a disciplinary matter.

6.2 Relevant staff members must not take on or assume a professional responsibility for a student with whom they are, or previously were, in an intimate relationship; or with whom they are, or previously were, in any close personal relationship without first declaring this to their Head of Institution.

6.3 If, at the Policy commencement date, a Relevant staff member is or has previously been in an intimate or close personal relationship with any student, they should declare that relationship to the Head of Institution immediately, even if the relevant responsibility for the student has ended.

6.4 If a member of staff is in an intimate or close personal relationship with a student for whom they do not currently have responsibility, but where it is reasonable to assume they may in future, the relationship should be disclosed to the relevant Head of Institution.

6.5 If this Policy is breached unintentionally — for example where a member of staff had no reasonable basis to suspect the other party was a student — the member of staff should inform their Head of Institution as soon as they become aware of the situation. If unsure, the member of staff should disclose.

6.6 A declaration of any close personal relationship should be made using the Staff Declaration form in the Supplementary Guidance (Appendix 2).

7. Close Personal Relationships

7.1 The University does not seek to discourage positive relationships between staff and students, and it may be appropriate for staff and students for whom they have responsibility to jointly participate in informal, social or leisure activities, providing careful consideration is given to potential conflicts, professional norms and boundaries.

7.2 Staff must be mindful of professional boundaries in all relationships with students. The risks of an actual or perceived imbalance of power are likely to be heightened where there is a significant age difference between the staff member and the student; the student is an undergraduate; and/or the student is more vulnerable for any reason.

7.3 Any relationship which involves, or is perceived to involve, (i) any form of dependence — emotional, practical, financial or otherwise; or (ii) favouritism towards

any student, will be considered to transgress professional boundaries and must be declared.

7.4 If there is any uncertainty, the best course is to declare a relationship, or any interaction with a student that is of concern, so that appropriate protective measures can be considered.

8. Relationships with students under the age of 18 or Adults at Risk

8.1 Members of staff who have responsibility for any students must never enter into an intimate relationship with a student or any other person under eighteen years of age or with a student who is an adult at risk, irrespective of whether the member of staff has any responsibility for the student or other person.

8.2 Staff are reminded that intimate relationships involving students under the age of eighteen where the staff member is in a position of trust, or where the student is an adult at risk, could fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

8.3 Anyone suspecting a member of staff of acting inappropriately towards a student or other person under 18 or an adult at risk should refer to the Children and Adults at Risk Safeguarding Policy and contact the Designated Safeguarding Officer.

9. Relationships and the Colleges

9.1 If a University Relevant staff member is also undertaking duties for a College they may be subject to College policies, additionally or alternatively to University policies, depending on whether the professional connection arises in a University or College context, or both.

9.2 The Policy applies to Relevant staff members of the University even where the responsibility for the student arose, arises or will arise solely in a College context (e.g. Admissions Tutor, Director of Studies, Tutor or undergraduate supervisor).

9.3 Where a person is both a College staff member and a Relevant staff member of the University, irrespective of any action the College may take, the University reserves the right to take action and/or put measures in place under this Policy and their University contract.

9.4 Where matters relating to this Policy cause any formal action to be taken by the University which may result in restrictions of the activities of the Relevant staff member, details will be reported to the relevant College(s) in the interests of safeguarding student welfare.

9.5 Where a University Relevant staff member declares a close personal relationship, the member of staff should also share that same information with their own College and the College of the student.

10. Admissions and Recruitment

10.1 If an intimate or close personal relationship is pre-existing between any member of staff who has a role in selection of candidates for admission to the University and a candidate seeking admission, that member of staff must inform the Head of Institution or equivalent at the outset of the admissions exercise so steps can be taken to avoid any conflict of interest.

11. Advice to Students

11.1 Students should be aware of the Policy and the terms and requirements placed on members of staff.

11.2 If an intimate or close personal relationship has developed contrary to this Policy, students are encouraged to advise their Head of Institution, Senior Tutor or any other senior member of their College or School whom they feel able to approach. There will be no disciplinary consequences for a student who does not do so.

11.3 The member of staff to whom a disclosure is made is responsible for reporting the matter to the Head of Institution, HR Business Partnering Team, Head of School or equivalent.

11.4 Regardless of whether a relationship has been disclosed, students are encouraged to seek support if they experience any inappropriate behaviour from a member of staff during that relationship.

11.5 Student behaviour that could be interpreted as flirtatious or making advances towards an intimate relationship should, except in trivial cases, be reported by the member of staff to the Head of Institution and/or HR Business Partnering Team.

11.6 Inappropriate behaviour by a student towards a member of staff or another student that amounts to sexual misconduct, physical misconduct or abusive behaviour may lead to action under the Student Disciplinary procedure.

11.7 Students engaged in an arrangement with an external organisation must adhere to that organisation's policies on personal relationships; if none exists, the clauses in this section apply.

12. Non-Consensual Behaviour

12.1 If a student experiences inappropriate behaviour in breach of this Policy, or is involved in a relationship they do not consider consensual, they should report to the Head of Institution or raise a complaint through the Student Complaints procedure.

12.2 Support and advice can be accessed from the Harassment and Violence Support Service (HVSS), University Counselling Service or College welfare team.

12.3 Staff who experience inappropriate behaviour from, or have a complaint against, a student should contact their HR Business Partnering Team, who will liaise with the Office of Student Conduct, Complaints and Appeals (OSCCA).

12.4 Support and advice for members of staff can also be sought from local institutional HR or the Dignity at Work contact service.

12.5 Measures may be put in place to separate and protect affected parties, and in serious cases action may be taken under the Student Disciplinary procedure.

13. Further Support available

13.1 The University provides a range of support resources for staff and students, including the Breaking the Silence website, University Staff Counselling Service, Occupational Health Service, Dignity at Work Contacts and Trade Unions.

13.2 Support for students includes the Harassment and Violence Support Service (HVSS), Office of Student Conduct Complaints and Appeals, and Student Counselling.

14. Confidentiality

14.1 Concerns raised under this Policy should be treated in confidence as far as reasonably possible and consistent with safeguarding the welfare of students.

14.2 Information about an intimate or close personal relationship may be placed on the member of staff's personnel file. Records will be treated as confidential and kept no longer than necessary.

14.3 There may be circumstances where it is necessary for a Head of Institution to notify a member of staff's College, balancing safeguarding considerations against the data protection/privacy rights of the member of staff.

14.4 Heads of Institution should consider whether it is appropriate to notify the student's College where a relationship is made known — in most cases only with the student's consent, unless there is a serious and compelling welfare concern.

15. Malicious or vexatious complaints

15.1 A malicious complaint is made with intent to intimidate, lower the reputation of, or otherwise harm a person, through knowingly false or misleading information.

15.2 A vexatious complaint is one made to harass or subdue somebody, or one that is unreasonable, frivolous, repetitive or unwarranted.

15.3 Where a complaint is found to be malicious or vexatious, the University may instigate a disciplinary process. No disciplinary action is taken where a complaint is mistaken or ill-founded but not malicious or vexatious.

16. Failure to comply with this Policy

16.1 Pursuing or commencing an intimate relationship contrary to this Policy will be considered through the staff disciplinary action, grievances and appeals procedures.

16.2 Failure to declare an intimate or close personal relationship will likewise be considered through the staff disciplinary action, grievances and appeals procedures.

17. Policy Review

17.1 This Policy will be reviewed by the Human Resources Policy and Strategic Projects team 12 months after the implementation date and every 4 years thereafter.

- 2024 (01.07.2024): New Staff and Students Relationships Policy.
- 1 August 2025 (01.08.2025): Reviewed and updated in line with the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 and OfS Condition E6.
- 1 August 2025 (06.04.2026): Cover note instruction revised to reflect ERA 2025.

Appendix 2 University of Cambridge — Staff and Students Relationships Policy: Supplementary Guidance

Reproduced from the University of Cambridge Supplementary Guidance (July 2024), which accompanies the Policy at Appendix 1.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Staff and Students Relationships Policy (the Policy) is intended to protect members of staff and students from misconduct and allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest, by ensuring appropriate safeguards and processes are in place to prevent abuses of power and sexual misconduct.

1.3 This Guidance is designed to help staff and students, including Heads of Institutions, in determining how the Policy should be implemented, and provides further information about disclosure, staff responsibility and behaviours.

1.4 This Guidance should be read in conjunction with the Policy and does not form part of employees' terms and conditions of employment.

2. Related Policies and Procedures

2.1 Links to related University policies and sources of support include: the Dignity at Work Policy; Conflict of Interest Policy; Children and Adults at Risk Safeguarding Policy; Employing and Working with Relatives Policy; the relevant Disciplinary policies; Breaking the Silence; Guidance on dealing with disclosures of sexual assault or violence; the Rules of Behaviour for students; Student Complaint Procedures; and University Financial Regulations.

2.2 Where a member of staff's action places them in breach of this Policy and in breach of any applicable College policy, the member of staff may face disciplinary action under both University and College Disciplinary Procedures.

3. Definitions

3.1 See the definitions at Appendix 1, Section 5, which apply equally to this Guidance.

4. Disclosure

4.1 This Guidance supports Heads of Institutions with notifications they may receive under the Policy. It does not cover all scenarios; advice should be sought from the relevant HR Business Partnering Team.

4.2 Heads of Institution may receive notifications from members of staff, students or third parties, either in conformity with the Policy or in respect of an alleged breach, or both.

4.4 A Relevant staff member must make a disclosure where there is, or has been, any close personal relationship with a student for whom they have direct or indirect academic or professional responsibilities.

4.5 The disclosure must be made to the member of staff's Head of Institution or equivalent, or to a senior member of the HR Division, who will speak to the Head of Institution on their behalf.

4.6 The disclosure should be made using the Declaration Form (SSR) at Annex 1, with confirmation of any action taken given to the member of staff in writing and retained on their personnel file.

4.8 If a member of staff is unsure whether a relationship should be disclosed, they should disclose it so that consideration can be given to whether protective measures are needed.

5. Action by Head of Institution

5.1 Following receipt of a disclosure, the Head of Institution will ensure, as appropriate, 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.

5.4 Alternative or protective measures may include: acknowledging receipt in writing and signposting support; treating the notification confidentially; consulting with those involved to identify any impact; re-organising duties so the member of staff is not teaching, supervising, assessing or providing pastoral support to the student; withdrawing from references, admissions or awards decisions concerning the student; and considering whether to notify the member of staff's College.

6. Next Steps

6.1 Further actions following protective measures may include: ensuring people affected are aware of support services; taking disciplinary action where there is a failure to comply; maintaining appropriate records on the personnel file; and learning lessons for the future, including considering training.

6.2 In exceptional circumstances where it is difficult to avoid a member of staff retaining some responsibility for a student, the Head of Institution should consider engaging an external supervisor and a non-specialist co-supervisor.

6.3 Under no circumstances may a Relevant staff member who has had an intimate relationship with a student take on, or continue in, any supervisory or tutoring role for them.

7. Staff Responsibility for a student

7.1 Intimate or close personal relationships between students and staff who have responsibility for them can cause significant problems because of the imbalance of power and authority, and can lead to accusations of favouritism, bias or exploitation.

7.5 Situations of direct or indirect responsibility include: any direct supervisory or teaching relationship; responsibility for a student's academic studies; responsibility for a student's personal welfare; a mentoring or ongoing administrative role; or involvement in admissions or selection.

8. Guidance on boundaries between support and responsibility

8.2 It is recognised that postgraduate students may work closely with other postgraduates or post-doctoral researchers who are also staff, in a relationship of 'support' rather than 'responsibility' — for example assisting with safe use of equipment, liaising on research progress, or ordinary friendship where there is no responsibility for academic progress, teaching, supervision or welfare.

8.3 It is not acceptable for postgraduate students engaged in paid teaching duties to have intimate relationships with students for whom they have a direct and ongoing responsibility.

8.4 Where a relationship arises in a 'support' context and there is a reasonable risk that conflicts of interest might arise, staff are encouraged to notify their Head of Institution, since a support role can evolve into one of responsibility over time.

9. Professional behaviour between members of staff and students

9.1 All staff are expected to act in line with the University Code of Behaviour. Staff should always strive to maintain appropriate and professional relationships, foster a trusting environment, honour confidentiality, and promote a culture where colleagues can speak out about inappropriate behaviour.

9.2 Recommended practice includes: maintaining appropriate physical and emotional distance; communicating via University accounts where possible; exercising caution before sharing personal contact details; being mindful of communication style and social media use; limiting personal support roles to official duties; not seeking personal information beyond what a University process requires; ensuring spaces reflect a formal place of work or study; avoiding inviting a student to a private home, room or vehicle; not giving undue special attention to any student; and not accepting or giving gifts beyond low-value or academic items.