

# Brasenose College

## Staff Student Relationship Policy for Academic Staff



**Applies to academic employees and academic workers including College postgraduate students engaged in teaching roles, but excludes other casual employees/workers who are enrolled as Brasenose students (eg student bar and conference workers).**

**This policy does not apply to student casual workers involved in admissions or outreach, but a separate protocol governs their behaviour in relationships with young people.**

**A separate policy also applies to staff student relationships for non- academic staff.**

**Approved by the Governing Body on 13 June 2018 with a revision to the preamble on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019.**

### **Preamble:**

This policy aims to highlight the potential risks in close personal or intimate relationships, however brief, between members of academic staff and students in the Brasenose workplace or in academic settings between individuals in particular where the staff member has responsibility for the student. It describes what the College advises, what it requires and how such relationships should be declared.

There are significant potential risks in any close personal or intimate relationships between individuals who occupy inherently unequal positions and there are wider potential issues. As a result, the College strongly advises staff not to enter into close personal relationships with any student. Issues that might arise include:

1. There is the potential for conflict of interest, exploitation, favouritism and bias which means that such relationships may undermine real or perceived integrity of the educational process.
2. There may be power imbalances between the individuals, resulting in an asymmetric relationship, potentially aggravated if one party has academic authority, for example giving grades, recommending for prizes/awards or writing references for the other.
3. These relationships may give rise to ethical concerns over the validity of consent and may often be less consensual than the individual whose position confers authority believes. In addition, circumstances may change, meaning that conduct that was previously welcome may become unwelcome. Even when both parties have consented at the outset to a close personal or intimate relationship, this past consent does not remove potential grounds for a complaint based upon subsequent unwelcome conduct, either during the relationship or after it has ended.
4. Such relationships may also have unintended, adverse effects on the academic environment, thereby impairing the learning environment for others, and undermining trust and integrity of teaching and learning within College. This may apply both during such a relationship and after any break-up.

For all these reasons, the College strongly advises that close personal or intimate relationships between individuals in inherently unequal positions should be avoided.

The College does not wish to introduce a complete ban on relationships between academic staff and students as it is not appropriate for the College to be the arbiter of individual's personal lives, and it recognises that in some cases junior academic staff and students, particularly postgraduates, may be at similar age and stage of career. Furthermore, a ban might result in relationships being kept secret, which would increase some of the risks. **But in all cases, academics must declare any relationship with students.**

Students who enter close personal or intimate relationships with an academic do not have a duty to declare it, but are encouraged to report it or raise any concerns or request for support with College Officers or members of the welfare team, and will not be subject to any disciplinary process for doing so.

### **Introduction**

1. This policy covers current and former close personal or intimate relationships, however brief, between members of academic staff and students, in particular, but not exclusively where the staff member has any responsibility for the student. These include, but are not limited to: marital, sexual, romantic, or emotional relationships whether they are conducted in person or online.

For the purposes of this policy, a 'member of staff' should be understood as including but not limited to any individual who is working within the College under a formal contract of academic employment or as a casual paid academic worker (including graduate students working as teaching assistants), and any other individual (such as visiting academics) to whom the College offers any of the privileges or facilities normally available to its academic employees.

A student should be understood as any individual who is studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification, or who is a student on any course arranged by or through the College or any part of the collegiate University, and who is a member of Brasenose College or is a member of another College for whom the staff member has responsibility.

2. The College regards the professional relationship between members of staff and students as central to the student's educational development and wellbeing. Professional relationships are any in which the staff member through his or her employment with the College has any educational, administrative, pastoral or supervisory involvement with a student. The College reminds staff of the importance of maintaining academic and professional integrity and of their responsibility for the welfare of students.

3. Implicit in the professional role of members of staff is an obligation to ensure that conflicts of interest do not arise, and that relationships with students for whom the staff member has any responsibility remain strictly professional, respecting the trust inherent in them.

4. While the College does not wish to regulate the private lives of its staff, it strongly advises staff not to enter into a close personal or intimate relationship with any student, and alerts them to the complications that may result.

5. To embark on a close personal or intimate relationship with a student, particularly with one for whom the academic has some responsibility, often involves difficulties rooted in the inequalities of power as well as problems in maintaining the boundaries of professional and personal life. Also, these relationships could disrupt the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues and might lead to accusations of favouritism or bias and undermine trust in the academic process.

### **Guidance for Academic staff on relationships and the need for disclosure**

6. The College requires that any close personal or intimate relationship by a Fellow or academic member of staff with a student is brought immediately to the attention of the Senior Tutor in order

that action can be taken to mitigate any undesirable consequences. The member of staff should also disclose any former relationship with a current student for whom they are given or are to be given responsibility. If the staff member is unsure, they should declare the relationship to the Senior Tutor, in order that they can assess the risk of undesirable consequences arising. Any declaration of this kind 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 with regard to their professional advancement or academic progress.

7. Disciplinary action may be taken against a member of staff who fails to declare a close personal or intimate relationship as required by this policy.

8. Attention is drawn to the fact that relationships involving students under the age of eighteen or vulnerable adults could fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 relating to persons in positions of trust having sexual relations with children under eighteen or vulnerable adults. Members of staff must not enter into a close personal or intimate relationship with a student under eighteen years of age or a vulnerable adult for whom they have any responsibility.

9. If a close personal or intimate relationship is pre-existing between a member of staff and a candidate for admission as a student, the member of staff must make the Tutor for Admissions aware of it at the outset of the admissions exercise, so that steps can be taken to avoid any conflict of interest arising. The matter will, as far as possible, be handled in confidence to ensure that there is no detriment to the candidate.

#### **College Officer's responsibilities**

10. If such a relationship develops during the course of employment or study between a member of staff and a student, this must be disclosed by the member of staff to the Senior Tutor as early as possible so they can determine whether any further action is required, and if action is required (eg the staff member has responsibility for the student), can take steps to:

- consult with the Tutor for Graduates if the case involves a graduate student
- consult with the member of staff and the student and anyone else necessary, to identify any impact their relationship may have within the College;
- facilitate the re-organisation of duties to minimise contact and ensure the member of staff is not tutoring, supervising, assessing, providing pastoral care, or professionally responsible for administering activities in which the student is involved; and,
- ensure that appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential effect of the relationship on other staff and/or students.

11. In the case of a student whose studies or research are in a very specialised area, such that no alternative tutor or supervisor is available, 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.

12. The Senior Tutor and Tutor for Graduates will deal with the situation in a manner that protects the dignity and privacy of all parties, and those involved will be expected to comply with any reasonable decision or action. There will be no obligation on the parties involved to keep their relationship confidential.

13. The Senior Tutor or Tutor for Graduates may seek advice on a confidential basis from the College's HR Manager.

### **Guidance for students on relationships and the need for disclosure**

14. The College advises students not to enter into any relationship with a member of Brasenose's staff and in particular academic staff, 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 (undergraduates) or Tutor for Graduates (graduates) in confidence.

### **Non-consensual relationships or inappropriate behaviour**

15. 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 policy on Harassment (Blue Book, section G.5).

Members of staff who experience unwanted advances and other unwelcome behaviour should raise the issue as soon as possible with the Senior Tutor or Tutor for Graduates, or with the HR Manager.

### **Support and guidance**

16. Any member of staff or student who has questions about this policy and its application should discuss them with the Senior Tutor or Tutor for Graduates in the first instance.

Additional support for staff may be sought from the Chaplain, or HR Manager.

Additional support for students may be sought from OUSU's Student Advice Service.

### **Relationships in a University context**

17. If a member of staff who has an appointment with the University in addition to their College appointment enters into a close personal or intimate relationship with a student, then that member of staff may be bound by University policies in addition to this policy.