

## Name of Policy: Staff-Student Relationship

**RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE:** General Purposes Committee

**RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:** Fellow for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Senior Tutor

**LINKED DOCUMENTS: College:** Harassment Policy, Conflict of Interest Policy, Conflicts of Interest in UG Admissions

**LINKED DOCUMENTS: Other:** University policy concerning the relationships between students and staff

**Annual Review date:** First meeting of Hilary Term

### Introduction

1. Positive professional relationships between members of staff and students are central to students' educational development and welfare. However, intimate or close personal relationships between students and staff who have responsibility for them can cause significant problems because of conflicts of interest, imbalance of power and authority, perceived favouritism, and undermining of trust and confidence in the academic process. Being a member of St John's College staff brings with it certain duties and responsibilities. If a staff member behaves in an unprofessional way towards a student it may have negative consequences for student welfare, and may cause risk to both the staff member themselves and the wider College. This policy concerns consensual relationships - non-consensual behaviour is covered at Paragraph 24 and in the [College's Harassment Policy](#).
2. To protect the welfare of students, and in the best interests of staff, St John's College:
  - a) Prohibits staff from entering into an intimate relationship with a student for whom they have any responsibility; and
  - b) Strongly discourages any other close personal relationship between a staff member and student for whom they have any responsibility that transgresses the boundaries of professional conduct, and requires such relationships to be declared; and
  - c) Strongly discourages intimate relationships between staff and any students, particularly where there is a large imbalance of power and authority, and requires any close personal or intimate relationship between a member of governing body and any student of St John's College to be declared, even where there is no direct responsibility.

### Scope

3. This policy applies to both academic and professional staff and to all students of the University. Terms used in paragraph 2, and throughout this policy, are defined at paragraphs 14 to 19.

4. Staff who fail to comply with this policy, or with any arrangements put in place under it (including those made following a declaration of a relationship defined under paragraph 2(b)) will be subject to the College's disciplinary process.

## Procedure

5. Members of
  - a) staff are prohibited from having an intimate relationship with any student of the University for whom they have any responsibility; and Members of staff must declare to either the Senior Tutor, Provost for Academic Affairs, Head of HR or Principal Bursar<sup>1</sup> as soon as possible if a close personal relationship has developed, is developing or appears likely to develop between them and any student for whom they have any responsibility; and
  - b) Governing Body must declare to either the Senior Tutor or Provost for Academic Affairs as soon as possible if a close personal or intimate relationship has developed, is developing or appears likely to develop between them and any student of the College.
6. Members of staff must not take on or assume responsibility for a student:
  - a) With whom they are in an existing intimate relationship or with whom they previously had such a relationship
  - b) With whom they are in an existing close personal relationship or with whom they previously had such a relationship without first declaring this to the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar to enable them to assess the risk of conflicts of interest and put appropriate protective measures in place if necessary.
7. Where
  - a) a staff member has current responsibility for a student with whom they are in an existing intimate or close personal relationship or with whom they previously had such a relationship; or
  - b) a member of Governing Body is in a close personal or intimate relationship with any student of St John's College they should declare that relationship to the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar within two months immediately following the policy commencement date, even if the responsibility for the student has ended since the commencement date.
8. If a member of staff is in an intimate or close personal relationship with a student for whom they do not currently have any form of responsibility, but where there is a reasonable risk that conflicts might arise in future they should disclose the relationship to the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of

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<sup>1</sup> Normally, the Head of HR/Principal Bursar for professional staff and Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs for academic staff.

HR/Principal Bursar to assess the risk of any conflict of interest arising and put appropriate protective measures in place if necessary.

9. Paragraph 2, and the disclosure obligations in paragraphs 5 to 8, apply even if the staff member's responsibility for the student arose, arises or will arise solely in the context of the wider collegiate University (e.g. under a separate University contract of employment ). While the University and colleges set their own internal policies, St John's College may put protective measures in place, or may take disciplinary action under the staff member's contract with the College, even if responsibility for the student arises solely in the context of the wider collegiate University. Where a College staff member is also a University employee, or an employee, associate, fellow, or member or has any appointment at another college, the College may share such information with the University or other colleges about relationships covered by this policy as is appropriate and necessary. This is to protect student welfare and ensure high standards of academic integrity and professional behaviour. Further guidance on sharing information can be found in the Appendices.
10. In the rare circumstance where this policy is breached unintentionally, for example where a staff member is unaware the other party is a student, and had no reasonable basis to suspect it, the staff member should inform the Senior Tutor/ Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar as soon as they become aware of the situation.
11. Members of staff must never enter into an intimate relationship with a student 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. Staff are reminded that intimate relationships involving students (including applicants or offer-holders) under the age of eighteen where the staff member is in a position of trust or where the student is an adult at risk suffering from certain mental disabilities could fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. If any such cases arise the College Safeguarding Officers will consider whether to notify the police, in addition to taking disciplinary action.
12. Even in cases which are not covered by this policy, i.e. where a staff member does not have and is not likely to have responsibility for a student, staff are strongly encouraged to be cautious before embarking on an intimate or close personal relationship with any student. Such relationships can run into difficulties and give rise to formal complaints or concerns rooted in real or perceived inequalities of power, accusations of bias or exploitation and questions about the nature of consent. The risks of such complaints or concerns are likely to be heightened where there is a big age difference between the staff member and the student; the student is undertaking their first degree following leaving school; and/or the student is more vulnerable because of certain disabilities or health conditions.
13. Guidance on the following matters is given in the Appendices:

- a) Appendix A: Making reports, and responsibilities of those who receive reports
- b) Appendix B: Principles for taking protective measures

## Definitions

14. 'Staff' includes every individual working within the College under a formal contract of employment or as a casual paid worker who is not also a student of the College. 'Staff' also includes graduate students working for the College who have a teaching, pastoral or supervisory responsibility towards other students of the College e.g. lecturers, and study skills advisors, but excludes students working for the College in any other capacity e.g. admissions/access helpers or casual library staff. For the purposes of this policy, 'staff' also includes outside contractors who have responsibility for students, e.g. sports coaches, as well as any individual to whom the College offers any of the privileges or facilities normally available to its employees (such as visiting academics or Emeritus Fellows, Emeritus Research Fellows, and Honorary Fellows).
15. Junior Deans are not prohibited from forming an intimate relationship with a student but they should as far as possible avoid taking direct responsibility for such a student and must disclose any such relationship as above, to the Senior Dean.
16. In this policy 'student' is to be understood widely. It means any individual currently studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification, or on any course arranged by or through the University or any part of the collegiate University, including visiting and exchange students, applicants, and offer holders (for which see also the College's Conflict of Interest policies for undergraduate and graduate admissions). It covers all students who are registered for a course even those whose status is suspended, but does not include former students who have finished their courses (unless they are current applicants or offer-holders for another University course). The wider definition of 'student' in this policy does not alter the narrower definition applicable throughout other University or College statutes and regulations.
17. 'Intimate relationship' includes sexual or romantic relationships, marriage or life partnerships, regardless of gender, gender identity or sexual orientation, including a brief relationship and one-off occurrences, and whether they are conducted in person and/or online and/or via electronic or any other form of communication.
18. 'Close personal relationship' excludes intimate relationships but means a relationship where the nature, content, emotional involvement and/or frequency of interactions and/or communications and/or financial dependency between a staff member and a student transgress the boundaries of professional conduct, or may be reasonably perceived to do so. This includes close family relationships,



which should be declared in the same way as other close personal relationships. Further Guidance on recognising 'close personal relationships' can be found in Annex 3 of the [University Policy](#) on relationships between students and staff.

19. '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 College context. It includes but is not limited to: giving tutorials, lecturing, teaching classes or seminars, overseeing projects or fieldwork, supervising, and setting and/or marking of examinations or other assessments of any type. It also includes acting as a mentor or college advisor, and making decisions over admissions, internships or work placements. Further Guidance, particularly on the distinction between 'responsibility' and 'support' in the context of postgraduate students and post-doctoral researchers can be found in Annex 2 of the [University Policy](#) on relationships between students and staff.

### **Additional policies staff must also comply with**

20. In addition to complying with this policy staff must also comply with:
- a. The College's [Conflict of Interest](#) Policies
  - b. The College's [Harassment Policy](#)
  - c. Any applicable policies of the University or other colleges where the staff member is an employee, associate, fellow, or member or with which they have any appointment.

Where a staff member's action places them in breach of this policy and in breach of any applicable University policy, that staff member may face disciplinary action by both the University and the College.

### **Advice to students**

21. Students should note the requirements of this policy for members of staff. If an intimate or close personal relationship has developed contrary to this policy, even if it predates the policy commencement date, the student is encouraged to disclose it to the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar and to a senior member of the college welfare team. Students should also particularly note the guidance and support available in any cases of non-consensual behaviour in Paragraph 24 and further sources of support in Paragraph 27.
22. Students should also note that the [University Policy](#) on relationships between staff and students prohibits all University staff from entering into an intimate relationship with a student for whom they have any responsibility. If such a relationship develops, students are encouraged to seek support within College from the welfare team, their College tutors, their College advisor, or the Senior Tutor. The College cannot take responsibility for the actions of non-College staff,

but would make alternative provision for tutorial teaching as needed and assist with requests to the University for any necessary re-arranging of duties.

23. Messages or other behaviours by students towards members of staff that could be interpreted as flirtatious or making advances towards an intimate relationship will usually need to be reported by the member of staff to the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar. This may result in protective measures to separate affected parties or minimise the possibility of conflicts of interest, complaints or questions over academic integrity or professional behaviour. Students should note that any behaviour that constitutes harassment may be the subject of disciplinary action under the College's Harassment Policy.

### **Non-consensual behaviour**

24. If any student finds themselves in receipt of inappropriate behaviour in breach of this policy or involved in a relationship that they do not consider to be wholly consensual, or if they consider that they have been adversely affected by a misuse of power, authority, or conflict of interest, they should make a report to the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar. They are also encouraged to seek support from the Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service, college harassment advisors or the college welfare team. This behaviour may be covered by the College's policy on harassment. All students are also encouraged to access the [Consent Matters programme](#) materials on the Welfare and Wellbeing section of the University website.

Members of staff who experience advances and other unwelcome behaviour from students should raise the issue with the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/HR Manager/Principal Bursar or their manager. They can also contact a harassment advisor. Protective measures to separate affected parties or minimise the possibility of inappropriate behaviour or complaints may be necessary and, in serious cases, including where there has been a course of conduct over time, behaviour that constitutes harassment may justify disciplinary action against the student.

### **Admissions**

25. Staff should note that the definition of student in this policy (contrary to that in other University and College statutes and regulations) includes applicants or offer-holders. This implies that any member of staff who has a role in selection of candidates is prohibited from entering into an intimate relationship with a candidate seeking admission with whom they interact as part of the admissions process or an offer holder for whom they will have any responsibility. Where such a relationship is pre-existing, the member of staff should abide by the College's policy on [conflicts of interest in admissions](#).

26. The definition of staff in this policy does not include students of the College who are employed to help during admissions, events for offer holders, summer schools or other access events in College, but who do not have a role in the selection of candidates. The College has separate guidelines that govern the behaviour of student helpers at these events.

#### **Further sources of advice**

27. Any member of staff or student who has questions about this policy and its application should discuss them with the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar or the Fellow for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. Staff who are members of a trade union may also seek advice from them. Additional support for students is available from the Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service, harassment advisors or the College welfare team.



## **Appendix A:**

### **Making reports, and the responsibilities of those who receive them**

- 1) This guidance supports the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar with notifications that they may receive through this policy. It does not cover all scenarios, and will in many cases need to be supplemented by HR advice.

#### **Notifications to the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar**

- 2) The Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar may receive notifications in relation to this policy from staff members, students or third parties. Notifications could be in compliance with a requirement of this policy, or in respect of an allegation the policy been breached, or both. Any member of staff or student who has questions about this policy and its application may also raise them with the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar.

#### **Initial action**

- 3) When the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar receives notification, they will:
  - a) acknowledge the notification, preferably in writing, and signpost any forms of welfare support that may be helpful;
  - b) so far as possible treat the notification in confidence (see additional guidance on confidentiality below);
  - c) consider whether it is necessary to re-organise duties to minimise professional contact with the relevant student, taking into account the guidance on the principles to follow in making alternative arrangements at Appendix B;
  - d) consider whether they should notify the University or the College of the student (where the student is not a member of St John's) of the relationship and any protective measures instigated, in line with the guidance on confidentiality below;
  - e) where necessary seek advice on a confidential basis from the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar/relevant subject tutors or from University HR.

#### **Next steps**

- 4) After any appropriate protective measures have been put in place, the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar should consider whether any further actions might be necessary, which may include (for example):
  - a) ensuring that any individuals affected are aware of the College and University's support services;





- b) in cases where there is a failure to comply with the policy and arrangements put in place under the policy, taking appropriate action under the relevant disciplinary procedures;
- c) ensuring good record-keeping, e.g. making sure that any relevant correspondence between the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar and a staff member is saved on the individual's personnel file;
- d) learning lessons for the future e.g. were wider questions raised about appropriate boundaries in the College and, if so, is there need for training?

### **Confidentiality**

- 5) Concerns raised under this procedure should be treated in confidence as far as that is reasonably possible and consistent with upholding the welfare of students.

Considerations should include:

- a) As far as possible communications regarding changes to practical arrangements necessitated by this policy should be neutral, limited to essential facts, and avoid publicising the situation that gave rise to them.
- b) Where the staff member is also an employee of the University or another college, the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar should consider whether it is appropriate to notify the University or the other college of a relationship, any alternative arrangements / protective measures implemented, and /or, where there is an alleged breach of this policy, the fact that a staff member is under investigation and/or is subject to action under the disciplinary procedures. This is likely to involve considering the welfare of students (including whether there is a potential risk to the student and/or other students arising from the nature of the allegations against the staff member) and the need to ensure high standards of academic integrity and professional behaviour are maintained across the collegiate University, while taking due account of the data protection/privacy rights of the staff member.
- c) The Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Head of HR/Principal Bursar should also consider whether it is appropriate to notify the student's department or college (where this is not St John's College). In most cases this should only be done with the student's consent, unless (a) there is a welfare concern or risk affecting other students at the college or (b) where the student is at risk of serious harm (as defined in the Guidance on Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare).

## Appendix B:

### Principles for taking protective measures

- 1) When the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs/Principal Bursar arranges any protective measures following a declaration of an intimate or close personal relationship under paragraphs 6-9 of this policy they should:
  - a) ensure the student and staff member are both aware of the disclosure; and
  - b) seek advice from the Head of HR who may in turn seek advice on a confidential basis from University HR; and
  - c) seek to protect the dignity and privacy of all parties, as far as reasonably possible; and
  - d) ensure any measures protect the student's best interests (in welfare and academic terms) while avoiding a conflict of interest, or grounds of complaint, for the member of staff, as far as reasonably possible. This may include identifying alternative sources of pastoral support for a student or making alternative arrangements for their supervision and/or teaching.
- 2) Usually the protective measures will have the effect of avoiding conflicts of interest by ensuring the staff member ceases to have, or does not acquire, any responsibility for the student. In practice this may involve any of the following:
  - a) consulting with both the member of staff and the student to identify any impact their relationship may have within the College and University;
  - b) re-organising the staff member's duties to ensure they are not teaching, supervising, tutoring, mentoring, assessing, examining, providing welfare/pastoral support or participating in administration or management of any activities in which the student is involved;
  - c) taking action to minimise the potential effect of the relationship on other staff or students;
  - d) the staff member withdrawing from writing references and recommendations, or being involved in any decision concerning admissions, academic awards/prizes, scholarships, or bursaries for the student in question.
- 3) In no circumstances may a member of staff who has, or has had, an intimate relationship with a student for whom they have responsibility take on, or continue in, any supervisory or tutoring role for them, even if the relationship predated introduction of this policy and has been declared within 2 months of the policy commencement date.
- 4) However, sometimes it is difficult to avoid a member of staff having or maintaining some responsibility for a student even though a close personal relationship has arisen and has been declared in accordance with this policy. This may occur, for example, where a student is conducting research in a highly specialised area where no other supervisor is available. However, in such cases, the Senior Tutor/Provost for Academic Affairs must always consider appropriate

protective measures, including whether a co-supervisor or external supervisor is appropriate to minimise the staff member's responsibility for that student.



## POLICY HISTORY

<i><b>Date of GB approval</b></i>	<i><b>Brief summary of changes</b></i>	<i><b>Confirmation that linked documents have updated if necessary</b></i>	<i><b>College policy register updated</b></i>
June 2023	Revised policy to follow closely new University policy. Requirement to declare and prohibition of intimate relationships where there is a direct responsibility. Reviewed by Committee and subsequently approved by Governing Body	Confirmed	Yes (I Burke)
May 2024	Various amendments made following Conference of Colleges guidance: Para 4: 'may be disciplined' changed to 'will be subject to the College's disciplinary process'. Removal of reference to policy commencement date, now policy is fully in force. Policy's coverage of Emeritus Research Fellows and Honorary Fellows made explicit. Added: para 15 on Junior Deans, reference to Admissions conflict of interest policies and to financial dependency in close personal relationships	Confirmed	Yes (I Burke)
HT 2025	Policy reviewed, change of Officer title to Fellow for EDI; agreed by GB	Confirmed	Yes (I Burke)