

ROBINSON COLLEGE



Personal Relationships Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Positive professional relationships between members of staff and students are an essential part of supporting our students' educational development and their welfare while at Robinson. 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.
- 1.2. This Policy sets out the College's position on personal relationships between staff and students. It mostly concerns consensual relationships. Non-consensual behaviour is addressed at section 8.
- 1.3. The Policy is directed at all members of staff (defined widely – see section 2.6).
- 1.4. The Policy is not contractual and may be amended from time to time.
- 1.5. It replaces the earlier version of the policy (dated 27 September 2024).

2. Some key terms used in this Policy

- 2.1. **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.
- 2.2. **Adult at risk** is someone aged 18 years or over who may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.
- 2.3. **Close personal relationship** means a relationship which, while not an intimate relationship, is one where the nature, content, involvement and/or frequency of

interactions and/or communications between a staff member and a student cross the boundary of professional conduct or may be reasonably perceived to do so.

- 2.4. **Grooming** is when a person builds a relationship with a child, young person or adult 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.
- 2.5. **Intimate relationship** is a consensual relationship characterised by emotional, physical, and/or sexual intimacy, which may be conducted in person, online or through electronic or any other form of communication. This includes brief relationships and one-off occurrences, through to marriage or life partnerships.
- 2.6. **Member of staff** includes:
- a) any person who has a contract of employment with the College;
 - b) any person engaged by the College as a casual worker;
 - c) any person working within the College, or with oversight by the College, under a contract for services or in a self-employed capacity
 - d) any person to whom the College offers any of the privileges or facilities normally available to its Fellows or employees (such as visiting academics);
 - e) any person engaged by the College to supervise or teach its students, whether under contract or otherwise;
 - f) any person engaged by the College as a Director of Studies
 - g) any Fellow or Emeritus Fellow of the College.
- 2.7. **Relevant staff member**, when used in respect of a particular student, means:
- a) a member of staff who has direct or indirect academic, pastoral, or professional responsibilities in relation to that student; or
 - b) anyone within paragraphs f) or g) of section 2.6, whether or not they have responsibility for that student.
- 2.8. **Sexual misconduct** means any unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature and includes but is not limited to:
- a) sexual harassment as defined by section 26(2) of the Equality Act 2010;
 - b) assault as defined by sections 2 and 3 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003;
 - c) rape as defined by section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- 2.9. **Student** includes any member of the College who is currently studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification, or is on any course or placement arranged by or through the University or College. Visiting and exchange students, prospective or current applicants, and offer-holders are also students for the purpose of this Policy, as are students who remain registered but whose status is suspended. Students who have finished their courses are not included, unless they are prospective or current applicants or offer-holders for another course at the University.

3. Intimate Relationships, and Close Personal Relationships

3.1. With effect from the Policy commencement date:

- a) Relevant staff members are prohibited from pursuing or entering into an intimate relationship with a student. Failure to comply with this Policy is a disciplinary matter.
- b) Relevant staff members are strongly discouraged from having a close personal relationship with a student. If such a relationship has developed, is developing or appears likely to develop, the Relevant staff member must declare it. Failure to declare is a disciplinary matter. If there is any uncertainty about whether a relationship is declarable, the best course is to declare it, or any interaction with a student that is of concern, so that possible measures to protect the student and the member of staff can be considered.
- c) Relevant staff members must not take on or assume a professional 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, without first declaring those facts.

3.2. If at the Policy commencement date, a Relevant staff member:

- a) is already in an intimate or a close personal relationship with a student; or
- b) has previously been in an intimate or a close personal relationship with a student,

they should declare that relationship within one month immediately following the Policy commencement date, even if their responsibility for the student has ended.

3.3. If a member of staff is in an intimate or any close personal relationship with a student for whom they do not currently have any direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, but where it would be reasonable to assume that they may in the future have responsibility for the student, they should declare that relationship.

3.4. If this Policy is breached unintentionally, for example where a member of staff is unaware that the other party is a student, and had no reasonable basis to suspect it, the member of staff should make a declaration as soon as they become aware of the situation. If a member of staff is unsure whether a relationship with a student should be declared, they should declare it.

3.5. The College recognises that circumstances may occur in which a particular relationship, though prohibited or discouraged by the terms of this policy, is perfectly acceptable and beyond reproach. The Warden therefore, having consulted the Senior Tutor, may make a dispensation from the terms of this Policy if the Warden is satisfied that the circumstances surrounding a particular relationship (provided that it has been declared) do not give rise to any of the concerns described in **section 1.1** of this Policy.

- 3.6. Relationships between staff and students that are coercive, exploitative or sexualised are always unacceptable and must not occur. All members of 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.
- 3.7. Declarations under this Policy should be made to the Warden. The Warden, consulting others as necessary, is responsible for assessing what protective or other measures are required.

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

- 4.1. 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.
- 4.2. Anyone suspecting a member of staff of acting inappropriately towards a person under the age of 18 or an adult at risk should refer to the **Safeguarding Policy**¹ and contact the College's **Designated Safeguarding Lead**².

5. Relationships and the University

- 5.1. If a Relevant staff member is also undertaking duties for the University or another College, they may be subject to that institution's policies, additionally or alternatively to this one.
- 5.2. Where matters relating to this Policy cause any steps to be taken by the College which may result in restrictions on the activities of the Relevant staff member, that action will be reported to the University and other Colleges as necessary, in the interests of safeguarding student welfare and ensuring high standards of integrity and professional behaviour across the collegiate University. For further information on confidentiality, see **Section 9** below.

¹ https://www.robinson.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/24-25%20Robinson%20Safeguarding%20Policy%20Jul-25_0.pdf

² <https://www.robinson.cam.ac.uk/people/dr-christopher-d-warner>

6. Admissions and Recruitment

- 6.1. If an intimate or close personal relationship is pre-existing between any member of staff who has a role in the selection of candidates for admission to the College and a candidate seeking admission, that member of staff must inform an Admissions Tutor or the Senior Tutor at the outset of the admissions exercise so steps can be taken to avoid any conflict of interest. The matter will, as far as possible, be handled in a way that respects confidentiality and ensures that there is no detriment to the candidate.

7. Advice to Students

- 7.1. If an intimate or close personal relationship has developed contrary to this Policy, even if it predates the Policy commencement date, or if the student is not sure that the member of staff has declared it, they are encouraged to advise their Tutor, or any member of College staff. However, there are no disciplinary consequences for the student if they do not do so.
- 7.2. The person to whom the disclosure was made will decide whether the possible need for a risk assessment and for protective or other action requires the matter to be reported to the Senior Tutor.

8. Non-Consensual Behaviour

- 8.1. If a student experiences inappropriate behaviour in breach of this Policy, or is involved in a relationship that they do not consider to be consensual, or if they consider that they have been adversely affected by a misuse of power, authority, or conflict of interest, they should report the matter to their Tutor or any member of College staff. For help in accessing advice and support, please contact the University's **Harassment and Violence Support Service**³ or the College's **welfare team**⁴
- 8.2. A member of staff who experiences inappropriate behaviour from a student, or who has a complaint against a student, should contact their line manager or the College's HR team. Depending on the circumstances, the matter may be reportable to the Dean.

³ <https://www.studentsupport.cam.ac.uk/harassment-and-violence-support>

⁴ <https://www.robinson.cam.ac.uk/college-life/student-support>

9. Confidentiality

- 9.1. Declarations, complaints and other communications about individuals that are made under this Policy should be treated in confidence as far as that is reasonably possible and consistent with safeguarding the welfare of students.
- 9.2. Information about an intimate or close personal relationship between a member of staff and a student may be placed on the member of staff's personnel file.
- 9.3. Communications regarding measures put in place as a result of this Policy should, as far as possible, be neutral, limited to essential facts, and without details published of the situation that gave rise to them. Records will be treated as confidential and be kept no longer than necessary in accordance with the College's data retention policy.
- 9.4. Where an intimate or close personal relationship is declared or otherwise becomes known, the College should consider whether it is appropriate to notify the student's Director of Studies, Tutor, faculty or department. In most cases this should only be done with the student's consent, unless there is a serious welfare concern affecting the student or other students.

10. Malicious or vexatious complaints

- 10.1. A malicious complaint is one that is made with the intention to intimidate, to lower the reputation of, or otherwise injure or harm a person, through knowingly providing false or misleading information or withholding information about an incident or issue.
- 10.2. A vexatious complaint is either one that is made with the sole or main intention to harass, annoy or subdue somebody, or one that is unreasonable, without foundation, frivolous, repetitive, deliberately burdensome or unwarranted.
- 10.3. If it appears that a person has made a complaint that is malicious or vexatious, the College may instigate a disciplinary process against them. Disciplinary action will not be taken if the matter appears to be mistaken or otherwise ill-founded but not malicious or vexatious.

The Warden

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