

Personal Relationships Policy

Policy statement

Clare College seeks to meet the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. We recognise that personal relationships may exist or develop within the College environment, and we seek to ensure that the behaviour of all those involved remains appropriate and that the relationship does not interfere with work. This policy applies to all members of the College community (ie students, staff and Fellows) and is intended to protect the interests of all parties by providing guidance in areas where personal and professional relationships overlap. It aims to make sure that members do not behave improperly, that they do not commit acts of bias, abuse their authority or find themselves in a situation where there could be a conflict of interest, or find that they are open to allegations of such.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the College's policies on [Equal Opportunities](#), [Bullying and Harassment](#), and the [Harassment and Assault Statement](#). It is not contractual, but indicates how the College aims to address the issue of personal relationships in the College.

Aims of this policy

This policy aims to:

- assist the College in dealing promptly and effectively with issues involving close personal relationships within the College community;
- inform members of the College of the standards the College expects, and of the likely consequences of any failure to meet these; and
- deal with issues arising from close personal relationships in a fair and consistent way, maintaining confidentiality where possible.

Definition of Personal Relationship

Personal relationships include immediate family relationships, sexual relationships, very close personal friendships and close business, commercial and financial relationships. In particular, any romantic or sexual relationship between a Fellow or other senior academic and a student raises serious questions of conflict of interest, trust, confidence and dependency, and of equal treatment in teaching, learning, selection, assessment and research. Such relationships can also disrupt the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues, and may also carry a serious reputational risk for the College. Similar problems may arise in the case of a romantic or sexual relationship between a member of staff and a line manager.

Conflicts of Interest

All members of the College should avoid any actions which may lead to a potential or actual conflict of interest or breach of confidentiality. The College does not seek to

discourage personal relationships, but it does require that such relationships are declared immediately where a relationship may have an impact on the College, or where a conflict of interest or breach of confidentiality may arise.

Examples of such relationships include:

- those between an employee in a position of authority and another employee (e.g. a Head of Department and a direct line report);
- those between a Fellow or other senior academic and a student;
- between a recruiting College Officer or Head of Department and a job applicant or;
- between an employee and anyone who is either a supplier (or potential supplier) of goods and services to the College or a client (or potential client) of the College, or a competitor.

Close personal relationships are of concern to the College only where there is an abuse of the member's position of trust, a breach of the required standards of propriety, a compromise of professional standards, a conflict of interests or a potential breach of confidentiality.

Declaration of Relationship

Any member who has a close personal relationship as described above should declare the relationship to their Head of Department/College Officer/Master. A declaration will be treated in confidence and, if appropriate, advice will be sought from the HR Manager.

Job applicants will be asked to declare any personal or family relationship with existing staff or Fellows on their application form, although this will not necessarily constitute a bar to employment. Fellows should also declare any personal or family relationship with student applicants to the College.

Recruitment and selection

If any employee involved in any recruitment activity has a close personal relationship with a candidate, they should declare this to the HR Manager as soon as they are aware of the candidate's application. In such situations, it would normally be appropriate for the employee to have no further involvement in the selection process. Similarly, any academic interviewer should declare to the appropriate Admissions Tutor any such relationship with a student applicant. This is to ensure that all decisions are made on an objective and fair basis. When making the recruitment/selection decision, consideration will be given to the impact the relationship may cause within the working environment, any resulting risks or conflicts of interests and any steps which could be taken to resolve these factors. It is acknowledged that employees sometimes recommend suitable candidates for

existing vacancies, and that Fellows may sometimes have a personal relationship with a student, although not normally in the same subject.

All job applicants must follow the College's standard recruitment process and submit an application form which will be considered on the basis of the set criteria, along with all other candidates. It is emphasised that the best candidate for the role should be selected, in line with the College's [Equal Opportunities Policy](#).

Supervision/Management Issues

Where a member of the College declares a close personal relationship with a colleague at the same level within the College, the respective Head of Department or College Officer will meet with the Fellows or employees individually to consider the impact that the relationship may cause within the working environment and any resulting risks or conflicts of interest. (such as potential breaches of confidentiality) which may be caused by the relationship.

If two employees work within the same department, the Head of Department will need to consider the impact, or perceived impact, the relationship will have on other colleagues in the department and the steps that need to be put in place to address any resulting issues.

Where a close personal relationship exists between a Head of Department or supervisor and an employee reporting directly to him/her, consultation should take place with the HR Manager on any steps to be taken. Where practicable, an alternative Head of Department should be identified, or consideration given to transferring one of the employees to a suitable alternative role. Where no suitable alternative report or role exists, additional measures may need to be put in place following consultation with those affected (in particular, responsibility for certain procedures such as performance reviews, grievance or disciplinary issues may need to be reallocated).

Normally, the Head of Department or supervisor should not be involved in the promotion, performance review or any other management activity which could advantage or disadvantage the other party or leave them open to allegations of favouritism or bias. Additionally, College members in a close personal relationship should not work together in any circumstance where a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage may be perceived to be gained from the overlap of personal and professional relationships. In such circumstances, it may be necessary to inform other College members about the relationship in order to explain a change of management arrangements. This will be discussed with the individuals concerned before a relationship is disclosed.

In all such cases, and in line with standard accounting practice, Heads of Department or supervisors should not in any circumstances be responsible for any financial process which could benefit the other party, including authorising timesheets, overtime or expense claims.

All academics, including Fellows, have a professional and an ethical duty to protect the interests of students. They are morally obliged to ensure that relationships with students for whom they have a professional responsibility remain strictly professional in nature. This applies to graduate students as well as undergraduates, and applies regardless of the age or status within the College or the University of the Fellow or other senior academic involved.

Where a Fellow or other senior academic declares a relationship with a current student, the Master will consult confidentially within the College in order to assess the best way of protecting the interests of both the student and the senior member concerned. The Master will then institute arrangements within the College to ensure that the Fellow or other senior academic is removed from all direct professional and working contact with the student concerned.

Any students who have been involved in a sexual or romantic relationship with a Fellow or other senior academic who do not consider their involvement to be truly consensual have the right of complaint under the College's Bullying and Harassment Policy.

It should be emphasised that meetings with College members who declare a relationship will focus on determining whether there is a potential or actual conflict of interest and if so, to determine what, if any, steps may need to be taken. The College respects an individual's right to privacy in such situations and will not seek to discuss details of the relationship itself. Brief written notes of the meetings should be made and a copy given to each individual as a record of any agreed actions. These notes will be held securely in an individual's file.

Behaviour While at Work

All members of the College are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to deal sensitively with any confidential information to which they may have access. A close personal relationship, particularly between two employees working in the same department, may have an adverse effect on their own and/or their colleagues' work. Examples of this include spending work time discussing personal matters, communicating confidential information to which the other would not normally have access, publicly displaying affection, causing difficulty or embarrassment to colleagues by arguing in the workplace, and not communicating with each other as the result of a disagreement or the break-up of a relationship.

Should such types of behaviour, which have a negative impact on work, start to occur, the individuals concerned would normally be invited to a meeting with their Head of Department/College Officer to discuss this, and informed of the impact their behaviour is having on their colleagues and/or performance of their work generally. If the behaviour continues, action under the College's [Disciplinary](#) or [Capability](#) Policy would result. This is not because of the existence of the relationship, but because of any impact it is having on other employees, or the performance of their work or on the College's reputation.

Client/Supplier Relationships

Where proposals for work are being sought from potential clients, or the College is considering a change of supplier, employees are required to declare any close personal relationships which could jeopardise the College's impartiality.

If the College is in a position of applying for external funding or grants, it is essential that any personal relationship to the grant holder is declared.

Breach of this Policy

Any employee, student or Fellow who feels they have been treated in a way which is contrary to this policy should raise this either formally through the grievance procedure, or informally with the HR Manager or Harassment Officer, harassmentofficer@clare.cam.ac.uk . Any breaches of this policy by any member of the College will be fully investigated and may lead to disciplinary action.

Up-dated September 2015