

St Peter's College Staff-Student Relationships Policy

Approved by Governing Body in October 2024

Introduction

1. This policy prohibits sexual or romantic consensual relationships between members of staff and students of the College, where the member of staff has responsibility in any way for the student. Sexual harassment is dealt with under the College's [Policy and Procedure on Harassment](#).
2. St Peter's College staff who are also employed by the University are also bound by the University's staff/student relationships policy (<https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/staff-student-relationships>).

Definitions

3. **Students:** This policy applies to all undergraduate and graduate students of St Peter's College while they are undertaking a course of study, or while they are intermitting their studies. This includes Visiting Students registered at the College.
4. **Staff:** This policy applies to all Fellows of St Peter's College, and to all members of staff employed on a permanent or casual basis by St Peter's College. This includes Junior Deans and Welfare Officers, graduate students working as tutors, and other 'out tutors', and any other individuals (such as visiting academics) to whom the College offers any of the privileges or facilities normally available to its employees.
5. **Responsibility:** 'responsibility' for a student includes any direct teaching, professional, pastoral, administrative or domestic responsibility for, or authority over, a student, whether temporary or permanent. It includes but is not limited to lecturing, teaching, overseeing projects or fieldwork, supervising, and setting and/or marking of examinations or other assessments, and the admission or selection of applicants. It also includes acting as a mentor or college adviser. Responsibility within the meaning of this policy does not include support or assistance given by one graduate student to another.

Policy

6. St Peter's College recognises the value of positive professional relationships between students and members of staff. Such relationships are central to students' educational development and welfare. Professional relationships are any in which the staff member through their employment with the College has any educational, administrative, pastoral or supervisory involvement with a student, or where the staff member has a governance or management responsibility at the College.
7. Sexual or romantic relationships between students and staff who have responsibility for them, however brief such relationships may be, can cause significant problems because of conflicts of interest, the imbalance of power and authority, perceived favouritism, and the emotional or practical consequences of relationships coming to an end. Staff have a responsibility to act in a way that protects and promotes student welfare, and that does not damage the reputation of the College.
8. Staff must not engage in sexual or romantic relationships with any students for whom they have responsibility. Staff must not engage in relationships with students for whom they have responsibility that result in the student becoming financially dependent on the member of staff. If staff become aware that there is a significant possibility that any such

relationship may develop, they must declare the situation promptly to the **Senior Tutor, the College Registrar** or the **Dean for Welfare**, and must cease to exercise any responsibility for the student in question.

9. Staff are expected to exercise professional judgment as to the appropriate limits of their personal relationships with all students, with due regard to the risks and their responsibilities outlined above, as well as the risks of harm and the perception of harassment. Even 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 any sexual, romantic, or close personal relationship with any student. Such relationships may give rise to complaints or concerns rooted in real or perceived inequalities of power, accusations of bias, favouritism or exploitation, adverse effects where a student becomes practically or emotionally dependent on a member of staff, and questions about the nature of consent. Greater power differentials such as where there is a significant age difference between the staff member and the student; where the student is taking their first degree; and/or where the student is particularly vulnerable, carry inherent potential for immense harm and increased legal liability.

Disclosure of Relationships

10. On their appointment staff are required to declare any relevant pre-existing relationships, or developing relationships, to the **Senior Tutor, the College Registrar** or the **Dean for Welfare**, in order that action can be taken to mitigate any unintended consequences. Relationships which should be declared include:

- i. any former, developing, or current relationship with a student for whom they are given or are to be given responsibility; and
- ii. any close familial relationship with a student.

11. If the staff member is unsure if they have any responsibility for the student, or if they are unsure if the previous, developing, or current relationship would be considered close enough to declare, they should declare the relationship to the **Senior Tutor, the College Registrar** or the **Dean for Welfare**, in order that the risk of any unintended consequences arising can be considered. 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.

12. If a close personal, familial, or intimate relationship is developing, or pre-existing between a member of staff and a candidate for admission as a student, the member of staff must make the **Senior Tutor, the College Registrar** or the **Dean for Welfare** aware of it at the outset of the admissions exercise, so that steps can be taken to avoid any conflict of interest arising. The **Tutor for Admissions**, or the **Tutor for Graduates** (as appropriate) may be consulted but the matter will, as far as possible, be handled in confidence to ensure that there is no detriment to the candidate

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

Responsibilities of the Senior Tutor, the College Registrar and the Dean for Welfare

14. Where a relationship is disclosed to the **Senior Tutor**, the **College Registrar** or the **Dean for Welfare** will take steps to:

- consult with the student and the member of staff, and with the relevant Organising Tutor(s)
- identify any impact the 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 welfare support, or professionally responsible for administering activities in which the student is involved
- ensure that appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential effect of the relationship on other staff and/or students.

15. In the case of a student whose studies are in a very specialised area, such that no alternative tutor is available, consideration will be given to whether it would be appropriate to engage an external tutor, in order to ensure that the member of staff does not have sole responsibility for overseeing the student's work or for taking decisions that affect the student.

16. The **Senior Tutor**, **College Registrar** and **Dean for Welfare**, will deal with the situation in a manner that protects the dignity and privacy of all parties, and ensures the wellbeing of each party. 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.

Inappropriate behaviour

17. If any student finds themselves in receipt of unwanted or inappropriate behaviour from a member of staff, 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 and Procedure on Harassment](#) and seek support from the **Dean for Welfare**, another member of the [College Health, Wellbeing and Welfare Team](#), or from the University's [Student Welfare and Support Services](#).

18. Members of staff who experience unwanted advances and other unwelcome behaviour from a student should raise the issue with the **Senior Tutor** or the **Dean for Welfare**.

Support and guidance

19. Any member of staff or student who has questions about this policy and its application should discuss them with the **Senior Tutor**, the **College Registrar** or the **Dean for Welfare**. Additional support for staff may be sought from an appropriate trade union. Additional support for students may be sought from the University [Student Welfare and Support Services](#) or the **Dean for Welfare**.

Information sharing

20. The College reserves the right to share information about any relationships falling within the scope of this policy with the University, another College, or any public or regulatory authority where it is appropriate and necessary to do so for a legitimate reason

including without limitation the protection of student welfare, compliance with any regulatory or legal obligations, or protection of the reputation of the College.

Breaches

21. Breaches of this policy constitute misconduct which may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Review and updating of this Policy

22. This Policy may be found on the College website. Copies in alternative formats are available on request.

23. This Policy will be subject to regular review by the Governing Body, on a four-year cycle. The next review is scheduled to take place in 2028-29.