



Lincoln College
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Lincoln College Staff-Student Relationship Policy

1. Introduction

This policy governs relationships between employees (both fellows and staff) and students at Lincoln College, aiming to maintain a professional environment that supports student welfare, educational integrity, professional ethics, and protects both staff and students. Employees of Oxford University should also familiarise themselves with the University's policy: <https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/staff-student-relationships#collapse4067531>.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. **Upholding Integrity and Professionalism:** The College values positive and professional staff-student relationships, recognizing their importance to students' educational development and welfare. However, intimate or close personal relationships between staff and students can lead to significant conflicts of interest, power imbalances, and risks to academic integrity.
- 2.2. **Preventing Conflict of Interest:** Intimate or close personal relationships between students and staff have the potential to cause significant problems because of conflicts of interest, imbalance of authority, perceived favouritism, and the undermining of trust and confidence in the academic process.
- 2.3. **Harassment:** This policy concerns consensual relationships; non-consensual behaviour is covered in the College's Policy and Procedure on Harassment: <https://lincoln.ox.ac.uk/policies-and-reports>.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. **Staff:** Includes all individuals employed by or who have a formal association with the College, including all classes of fellows, all academic and non-academic staff, casual employees, graduate students employed to teach students, self-employed tutors who teach students, and contracted workers who may interact with students.
- 3.2. **Student:** This policy applies to Undergraduate, Graduate, and Visiting Students of the College, and to associate members of the JCR and MCR, and refers to all such people as 'students'. It also applies to offer-holders and potential student applicants to the College.
- 3.3. **Intimate Relationship:** Includes romantic or sexual relationships, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

- 3.4. **Close Personal Relationship:** Relationships that blur professional boundaries, leading to conflicts of interest or perceived preferential treatment (e.g., emotional dependence or significant friendships beyond what may be considered normal professional support).
- 3.5. **Responsibility:** Broadly covers any teaching, supervisory, pastoral, administrative, or advisory role over a student, regardless of context or duration and includes the following:
 - 3.5.1. there is a direct supervisory or teaching relationship (for example between postgraduate students and their supervisor, or tutors and their tutees);
 - 3.5.2. a member of staff has direct or indirect responsibility for that student's academic studies (for example, they act as an assessor of a student's work);
 - 3.5.3. a member of staff has direct or indirect responsibility for that student's personal welfare (for example providing welfare services or acting as a mentor or college advisor);
 - 3.5.4. a member of staff has a mentoring role or ongoing administrative responsibility for a student; or
 - 3.5.5. a member of staff is involved in the admission or selection of applicants or offer-holders.

4. Prohibition on Intimate Relationships with Students:

- 4.1. Staff are prohibited from entering into or maintaining an intimate relationship with any student for whom they hold responsibility.
- 4.2. Where a pre-existing relationship exists, it must be disclosed immediately according to the process outline in Appendix 1.
- 4.3. Intimate relationships with students for whom staff do not currently have any form of responsibility must be disclosed to the College if there is a reasonable risk that this could or could be seen to influence professional judgment or academic integrity or if there is a reasonable risk that conflicts of interest might arise. Staff should disclose the relationship according to the process outline in Appendix 1 in order to assess the risk of any conflict of interest arising and put appropriate protective measures in place if necessary.

5. Disclosure of Close Personal Relationships:

- 5.1. Close personal relationships with students must be disclosed to the College if there is a reasonable risk that this could or could be seen to influence professional judgment or academic integrity or if there is a reasonable risk that conflicts of interest might arise. Staff should disclose the relationship according to the process outline in Appendix 1 in order to assess the risk of any conflict of interest arising and put appropriate protective measures in place if necessary.

6. Students Under 18 and Vulnerable Adults:

6.1. Staff must not engage in any form of intimate or close personal relationship with students under the age of 18 or any vulnerable adults.¹

6.2. All staff should familiarise themselves with the College's Safeguarding policy: <https://lincoln.ox.ac.uk/policies-and-reports>.

7. **Role of Junior Deans:**

7.1. Junior Deans are not required to disclose all close personal relationships due to their unique community integration. However, they must disclose intimate relationships with students or close personal relationships where there is a potential conflict of interest in order to ensure transparency and so that support can be provided if needed.

8. **Disciplinary Actions:**

8.1. Failure to comply with the terms of this policy may result in disciplinary action, following the College's disciplinary processes.

9. **Implementation and Support**

9.1. **Data Sharing with the University:** Disclosures may require sharing limited information with Oxford University, especially in cases involving risk to student welfare. The College will balance confidentiality with the duty to prevent harm.

9.2. **Guidance and Support for Students and Staff:**

9.2.1. Students are encouraged to seek advice from the Senior Tutor or member of the College's welfare team if they feel a relationship with a staff member may impact their welfare or academic experience.

9.2.2. Staff may consult with the Senior Tutor (in the case of academic staff and fellows) or Head of HR (in the case of domestic and administrative staff) regarding any uncertainties about this policy or how to manage professional boundaries effectively.

10. **Review and Communication:**

10.1. This policy will be reviewed annually by Welfare Committee.

¹ An adult is not considered to be vulnerable due to any personal characteristic. Any adult may be regarded as vulnerable due to particular circumstances at a particular time. The definition is wide, however this may be regarded as anyone over the age of 18 years who may be unable to protect themselves from abuse, harm or exploitation, which may be by reason of illness, age, mental illness, disability or other types of physical or mental impairment. Further advice may be sought from the College's Designated Safeguarding Lead (the Senior Tutor).

Appendix 1: Lincoln College Process for Making Disclosures

1. Who Should Disclose?

- 1.1. Staff: Any member of staff who is in or enters into:
 - 1.1.1. An intimate relationship with a student.
 - 1.1.2. A close personal relationship with a student where a potential conflict of interest exists or could reasonably be perceived to exist.
- 1.2. Students: Students may raise concerns about conflicts of interest or welfare impacts with the Senior Tutor or a member of the Welfare Team.

2. When to Disclose?

- 2.1. Disclosure should be made as soon as possible:
 - 2.1.1. After the relationship develops or becomes likely to develop.
 - 2.1.2. If a pre-existing relationship comes under the scope of this policy due to changes in roles or responsibilities.

3. To Whom Should Disclosures Be Made?

- 3.1. Academic staff and fellows: Disclosures must be made to the Senior Tutor.
- 3.2. Domestic and administrative staff: Disclosures must be made to the Head of HR.
- 3.3. If there is uncertainty about whom to contact, the disclosure may be directed to either party for guidance.

4. How to Make a Disclosure?

- 4.1. Disclosures can be made in person or in writing.
- 4.2. The disclosure should include:
 - 4.2.1. The nature of the relationship.
 - 4.2.2. Any professional responsibilities involving the student.
 - 4.2.3. Any potential risks of conflict of interest.

5. Initial Actions Following Disclosure

- 5.1. The recipient (Senior Tutor or Head of HR) will:
 - 5.1.1. Acknowledge the disclosure in writing.
 - 5.1.2. Assess the relationship's potential impact on professional responsibilities, academic integrity, or student welfare.
 - 5.1.3. If necessary, meet with the parties to discuss protective measures.
 - 5.1.4. Confirm protective measures in writing.
 - 5.1.5. Treat the disclosure as confidential, sharing details only as necessary to implement protective measures.

6. Protective Measures

6.1. If required, the College will:

6.1.1. Reassign teaching, supervisory, or other duties to avoid conflicts of interest.

6.1.2. Ensure that alternative arrangements for academic or professional responsibilities are in place to maintain objectivity and fairness.

7. Confidentiality

7.1. Disclosures will be handled discreetly, and information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis.

7.2. The privacy of both the staff member and student will be respected as far as possible, consistent with the College's obligations to safeguard the welfare of staff and students and promote academic and professional integrity.

8. Failure to Disclose

8.1. Staff who fail to disclose as required by this policy may be subject to disciplinary action as per the College's disciplinary procedures.