

## **1 Guidelines on Personal Relationships at Work**

These guidelines cover all staff of the College. It is intended to provide guidance in areas where personal relationships overlap with working relationships and to ensure that individual members of staff do not commit acts of impropriety, bias, abuse of authority or conflict of interest and do not lay themselves open to allegations that they have done so.

The College values and relies upon the professional integrity of relationships between members of staff and in the staff/student relationship. In order that College business is conducted and perceived to be conducted in a professional and proper manner it is necessary to distinguish between, and take account of, personal relationships which overlap with professional ones.

In the context of this document, a **personal** relationship is defined as:

- business, commercial or financial relationships
- close friendships / social relationships
- family relationships
- intimate relationships including marital, sexual, romantic, and emotional

## **2 Relationships between staff and students**

There is potential for exploitation and harm of vulnerable young people and staff have a responsibility to ensure that an unequal balance of power is not used for personal advantage or gratification.

Wherever possible, staff should avoid behaviour, which might be misinterpreted by others, and report and record any incident with this potential.

You should conduct yourself at all times in ways that are consistent with College policy and procedures and acknowledge your professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students and accept the obligations and constraints inherent in that responsibility.

Should a personal relationship already exist when the member of staff or student enters the College or develop while the student is registered, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to declare their involvement to their line manager or Director. There will be no requirement to give details of the involvement.

You should not establish or seek to establish social contact with learners for the purpose of securing a friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship. Even if a young person seeks to establish social contact, or if this occurs coincidentally, you must exercise your professional judgement in making a response and be aware that such social contact could be misconstrued.

You must not have any sort of friendship or romantic or sexual relationship with any student who is under the age of 18. To maintain the relationship with students based on trust, confidence and equal treatment, you must not enter into an intimate relationship with a student for whom you have a responsibility in the areas of teaching / learning, assessment, selection, pastoral care or research – even if that learner is legally considered to be an adult.

Such relationships can lead to perceived or actual conflicts of interest, which can have a detrimental effect on the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues.

The College recognises, however, that such relationships may exist when a member of staff is appointed or when a student enrolls, or that a relationship may develop between a member of staff and a student during a programme of study. Where a member of staff has a professional role in relation to a student with whom (s)he has a personal relationship, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform his/her manager in order that alternative teaching, tutoring or assessment arrangements may be made, where it is felt necessary.

### **Relationships where a member of staff is the Primary Carer**

Relationships in which a member of staff acts as the primary carer, either formally or informally, for a student are also likely to break the College's expectations of professional conduct. In addition, such relationship may put the member of staff at risk of contravening the College or Local Authority Safeguarding Procedures. Such relationships can lead to perceived or actual conflicts of interest, which can have a detrimental effect on the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues.

The College recognises, however, that such relationships may exist when a member of staff is appointed or when a student enrolls, or that a relationship may develop between a member of staff and a student during a programme of study. Where a member of staff has a professional role in relation to a student with whom (s)he has a personal relationship of any nature, including that of carer, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform his/her manager in order that alternative teaching, tutoring, support or assessment arrangements may be made, where it is felt necessary.

### **3 Relationships between members of staff**

Although the existence of a personal relationship between members of staff does not necessarily constitute a bar to the employment or promotion of either party, staff should declare to their line manager any personal relationships which may give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest, trust or breach of confidentiality.

Where a personal relationship exists or develops between members of staff who are in a line management or supervisory relationship at work, they must not be involved in recruitment, selection, PDRs, promotion or in any other management activity or process involving the other party. Additionally, staff in a personal relationship should not work together in any circumstance whereby a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage may be perceived to be gained from the overlap of a personal and professional relationship. It is your responsibility to make a declaration of interest to your line manager or senior manager, where appropriate. There will not be a requirement to give details of the involvement, but if the declaration leads to a required change in line-management relationships, then other staff members will have to be informed accordingly, after consultation with the parties involved.

If you are uncertain about what action to take then seek advice, in confidence, from a member of the Human Resources team. Failure to declare a conflict of interest, which results in the curriculum, administrative or college processes being brought into question, could result in disciplinary action.

### ***Examples of Best Practice***

#### **Relationships with Learners**

To avoid behaviour, which might be misinterpreted by others, and report and record any incident with this potential, you **SHOULD** not:

- Behave in a manner which would lead any reasonable person to question your suitability to work with children or act as a role model

To avoid behaviour, which might be misinterpreted by others, and report and record any incident with this potential, you **MUST** not:

- Where you are a person aged 18 or over in a position of trust with a child under 18, engage in sexual activity with or in the presence of that child, or to cause or incite that that child to engage in or watch sexual activity as these are criminal offences
- Make sexual remarks to a learner (including email, text messages, phone or letter)
- Discuss your own sexual relationships with, or in the presence of, learners
- Discuss a learner's sexual relationships in inappropriate settings or contexts
- Invite learners to join your social networking site or join theirs unless linked directly with agreed college activities/the curriculum

This does not mean that you may not have a relationship with another adult who also happens to be a student at this college – but for whom you have no responsibility. E.g. it would be unreasonable for the college to try to forbid you from continuing a relationship with someone who you discover happens to attend a part-time adult education class (unless you teach or assess on that class)

## **Relationships with Colleagues**

If you are having a relationship with a colleague within the same team or management structure there could be circumstances where either of you could potentially gain some sort of advantage or disadvantages (or be perceived to gain advantage or disadvantage by other people).

This could also apply to people in family relationships: Father/son; siblings; in-laws, etc.

- To avoid any accusation of bias you should ensure that you are not involved in any HR-related college procedures where you are related to an applicant or have a close personal relationship with him / her outside work (college procedures such as interviews/appointments, disciplinaries, grievances, PDRs, etc).
- We expect people in this situation to tell their line manager about this - in case specific arrangements have to be made to avoid perceived or real advantage, e.g. it would not be appropriate for you to approve the expenses claim of your partner
- This will be done with respect for people's privacy but your manager may need to agree with you who this information has to be shared with
- It is also important that colleagues who are in a relationship or are related should behave professionally and according to this code in order to maintain their colleagues' confidence in their independence and objectivity.

This may be particularly relevant if a relationship has broken down and there are unresolved personal issues