

MAGDALENE COLLEGE

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ACADEMIC STAFF AND STUDENTS IN THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

A. Introduction and Summary

1. Good relationships between members of staff and students are an important aspect of College life. However, intimate relationships or close personal relationships can lead to actual or perceived imbalances of power, conflicts of interest and discrimination or bias which can undermine trust and confidence.
2. The University has adopted a Staff and Students Relationship Policy (the “University Policy”) which is in force for all members of University staff with effect from 1 July 2024.¹ The University Policy is summarised in Part B, below. The University has also issued Supplementary Guidance in relation to the University Policy.²
3. This document sets out the policy of the College (the “Magdalene Policy”) with regard to intimate and close personal relationships between the academic staff of the College and student members of the College. Like the University Policy, it aims to prevent conflicts of interest or abuses of power, whether intentional or unintentional and actual or perceived.
4. For these purposes the term “academic staff” includes the Master, all Fellows of whatever category (with the exception of the two Bye-Fellows elected annually from the MCR) and College Officers, including College Lecturers and Directors of Studies whether or not they are employed by the College within the meaning of employment law. The term therefore includes anyone who holds a Fellowship (including Honorary Fellows, Emeritus Fellows and Life Fellows), whether or not their work is of an academic character, in any dealings which they have with student members of the College. The policy also applies, subject to paragraph 22, below, to anyone who is not a member of the academic staff but who provides Tripos supervisions to student members of the College. Relationships between other staff members and student members of the College are dealt with in a separate statement.
5. All members of the academic staff of the College are required to comply with the University Policy, whether or not it is formally applicable to them. However, the Magdalene Policy goes beyond the University Policy in certain respects. The reason is that the College is a small residential community the nature of which means that every member of the academic staff has responsibilities towards every student of the College, even if they have no teaching, administrative or pastoral contact with that student.
6. For that reason, any form of intimate relationship between any member of the academic staff and any student member of the College is prohibited save in exceptional cases. Close personal relationships between members of the academic staff and student members of the College are strongly discouraged. More detail is given in the following sections of this Policy.
7. The Magdalene Policy addresses consensual relationships. Non-consensual, coercive or exploitative behaviour is strictly prohibited and will be treated as an instance of gross misconduct. It may also involve a breach of the criminal law.

¹ https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/staff_and_students_relationships_policy_101024.pdf

² https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/staff_and_students_relationships_policy_supplementary_guidance_101024.pdf

8. All members of the academic staff should make sure that they are familiar with the provisions of both the Magdalene Policy and the University Policy (and its Supplementary Guidance) and act in compliance with them.

B. The University Policy

9. The University Policy applies to all members of University staff. Under Section 9.2:

“The Policy applies to Relevant Staff Members of the University even where the responsibility for the student arose, arises or will arise solely in a College context (eg in roles such as Admissions Tutor, Director of Studies, Tutor or undergraduate supervisor) such as where the member of staff has a separate College contract of employment or other form of engagement”;

The University Policy does not apply to “employees and workers solely engaged by the Colleges” although it states that “College employees and workers are expected, however, to behave in a manner that is consistent with the University Code of Behaviour if undertaking their work or services specifically in the University environment.” (Section 3.2)

10. The University Policy defines an “intimate relationship” as:

“a consensual relationship characterised by emotional, physical, and/or sexual intimacy, which may be conducted in person and/or online and/or via electronic or any other form of communication. This includes brief relationships and one off occurrences, through to marriage or life partnerships, regardless of gender, gender identity or sexual orientation.” (Section 5.7)

11. A “close personal relationship” is defined as excluding intimate relationships but means “a relationship where the nature, content, involvement and/or frequency of interactions and/or communications between a staff member and a student transgress the boundaries of professional conduct or may be reasonably perceived to do so”. (Section 5.3)

12. The University Policy is primarily concerned with relationships between a “relevant staff member” and a student.

(a) a relevant staff member is defined by Section 5.9 of the University Policy as “a member of staff who has direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, in relation to that student”.

(b) Section 5.10 of the University Policy provides:

“Responsibility for a student is defined widely and includes any teaching, professional, pastoral or administrative responsibility or authority over a student, whether temporary or permanent, whether formally conferred on or voluntarily assumed by the staff member and whether the responsibility arises in a University or a college context. This includes but is not limited to lecturing, teaching classes or seminars, overseeing projects or fieldwork, supervising and setting and/or marking of examinations or other assessments of any type. It also includes acting as a mentor or college advisor.”

13. The University Policy prohibits a relevant staff member from pursuing or entering into an intimate relationship with a student for whom that staff member has “direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, in

relation to that student". Any such relationship which already exists must be disclosed to the staff member's Head of Department (see Section 6 of the University Policy).

14. Close personal relationships are addressed in Section 7 of the University Policy. Relationships with students under the age of 18 or with adults at risk are addressed in Section 8.

C. The Magdalene Policy

15. Members of the academic staff of the College are required to comply with the University Policy in their dealings with student members of the College whether or not the University Policy is formally applicable. For these purposes, references to the Head of Department in the University Policy should be treated as a reference to the Master. If the member of the academic staff concerned is the Master, those references should be treated as references to the President.
16. The nature of the College as a small residential institution means that all members of the academic staff of the College have responsibilities for all student members of the College. For that reason, members of the academic staff of the College must in addition comply with the requirements of the Magdalene Policy.
17. Intimate relationships, as defined in the University Policy, between any member of the academic staff and any student member of the College are prohibited subject only to the provisions of the next paragraph.
18. If a member of the academic staff considers that there are exceptional reasons why an intimate relationship with a student member should be considered acceptable they must refer the matter to the Master, or in the case of the Master to the President, as soon as practicable. If that relationship existed prior to the entry into force of this policy, or prior to either the student member or the member of the academic staff joining the College, it should be declared at once. Otherwise, the matter should be referred before any intimate contact takes place.
19. If the Master (or President) considers that the relationship is one which does not run counter to the purposes of the present Policy, then they may indicate that it would not constitute a breach of the Policy. However, in no circumstances may a member of the academic staff continue to teach, act as tutor or director of studies, or otherwise exercise any academic, pastoral or administrative responsibility for the student concerned.
20. Any close personal relationship, as defined in the University Policy, between a member of the academic staff and a student member of the College is strongly discouraged. If such a relationship exists or may come into being, it must be reported as soon as practicable to the Master (or, in the case of the Master, to the President).
21. All members of the academic staff should behave at all times with complete propriety in their dealings with all student members of the College. While social contact with students, e.g. at College dinners and receptions, is both acceptable and encouraged, members of the academic staff should at all times be conscious of their responsibility towards all students and avoid any conduct which might reasonably be seen as improper or as placing themselves in a position of actual or perceived conflict. In particular, a member of the academic staff should not enter a student's accommodation unless there is a clear professional reason to do so.
22. Where a person who is not a member of the academic staff as defined in this policy provides Tripos supervisions for student members of the College, the provisions of this policy apply to them in relation to their dealings with those student members. The

supervision of doctoral and other research students by those who are not members of the academic staff of the College is subject only to the University Policy.

23. The law imposes additional responsibilities in respect of dealings with students who are under the age of eighteen or are classified as adults at risk. Intimate relations with such students are never permissible and may involve an offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The special attention of any member of the academic staff who teaches or otherwise has direct responsibility for any such student is drawn to Section 8 of the University Policy.
24. The Magdalene Policy is without prejudice to the obligations to which those to whom it applies may be subject under law or under the rules or policies of the University or of any other college.

D. Procedures

25. Procedures for complaints regarding alleged breaches of the University Policy are set out in Section 12 of the University Policy. A student who wishes to complain about conduct which they consider may breach the terms of the Magdalene Policy should use the procedure set out in the College's Policy in Cases of Harrassment, available on the College website.³
26. Section 12 of the University Policy also gives details of how a member of the academic staff may complain regarding the behaviour of a student which might involve a breach of the University Policy can complain about that conduct. A member of the academic staff who considers that they have experienced inappropriate behaviour by a student member of the College or who considers that another member of the academic staff has behaved in a way which might breach the Magdalene Policy should contact the Master.

E. Conclusion

27. This Policy entered into force on 1 October 2025 and replaces all previous policies with effect from that date. The Policy may be amended by the Governing Body in light of changes in law or operational requirements.

July 2025

³ [Policies and Procedures | Magdalene College](#)