

## MAGDALENE COLLEGE

### RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN 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. As a College of The University of Cambridge, the College often refers to guidance and policy issued by the University, particularly in relation to students. 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 August 2025. Whilst College staff are not subject to the University policy, the Magdalene policy uses similar definitions and principles.
3. College staff can be an important source of support and information to students throughout their time at University. This support, guidance and helpfulness is encouraged and part of life within the college. It is important to recognise that even without academic responsibility for students, staff may still hold a relative or perceived position of power. There may also be circumstances where the perceived balance of power lies with a student(s).
4. This document sets out the Magdalene College policy regarding intimate and close personal relationships between college staff and students. It aims to prevent conflicts of interest or abuses of power, whether intentional or unintentional and actual or perceived.
5. A separate but similar policy covers the relationships between the Master, Fellows and academic staff of the College and students. Academic Staff are also bound by the University Policy.
6. The Magdalene Policy goes beyond the University Policy in certain respects. The reason is that the College is a small residential community, and staff may have interactions with students in less formal settings and potentially have access to student living accommodation.
7. For that reason, any form of intimate relationship between any member of the staff and any student member of the College is prohibited save in exceptional cases. Close personal relationships between members of staff and student members of the College are strongly discouraged. More detail is given in the following sections of this Policy.
8. The Magdalene Policy addresses consensual relationships. Non-consensual, coercive or exploitative behaviour is strictly prohibited and should this be proved, will be classed as gross misconduct. It may also involve a breach of the criminal law.
9. All members of staff should make sure that they are familiar with the provisions of the Magdalene Policy and act in compliance with it.

#### B. The University Policy and definitions

10. The University Policy is referenced because even though it does not directly apply to College staff it does state:  
*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)
11. For reasons of clarity and consistency the Magdalene College policy uses the same definitions of relationships as the University policy. The University Policy defines an “intimate relationship” as:
12. *“a consensual relationship that involves one or more of the following elements: (i) physical intimacy including isolated or repeated sexual activity; or (ii) romantic or emotional 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) 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)*

#### **C. The Magdalene College Policy**

13. Intimate relationships, as defined above between any member of staff and any student member of the College are prohibited subject only to the provisions of the next paragraph.
14. If a member of 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 Assistant Bursar, or in the case of the Assistant Bursar to the Senior Bursar, as soon as practicable. If that relationship existed before this policy came into effect, or prior to either the student or the member of staff joining the College, it should be declared at once. Otherwise, the matter should be referred before any intimate contact takes place.
15. If the Assistant Bursar (or Senior Bursar) considers that the relationship is one which does not contravene this policy this shall be confirmed in writing to both parties. However, depending on the role of the member of staff, it may be necessary to limit or remove any professional interaction with the student.
16. Any close personal relationship, as defined above, between a member of 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 Assistant Bursar (or, in the case of the Assistant Bursar, to the Senior Bursar).
17. All members of staff should at all times behave in a professional manner with students and should not enter a student's accommodation unless it is in the course of their duties. Staff should follow the protocol for entering student rooms. Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring staff are aware of this protocol.
18. 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.

#### **D. Procedures**

19. A student who wishes to complain about conduct which they consider may breach the terms of the Magdalene College Policy should use the procedure set out in the College's Policy in Cases of Harassment, available on the College website.
20. It is acknowledged that there may be circumstances where the relative balance of power lies with a student(s). Should a member of staff ever feel coerced by a student in any respect, have concerns about the behaviour of a student or considers that they have experienced inappropriate behaviour by a student they should contact the HR department. The HR department, with the permission and cooperation of the member of staff, will address this through the appropriate procedure.
21. If a member of staff considers that another member of staff has behaved in a way which might breach the Magdalene Policy they should contact the Assistant Bursar, either informally or formally in the form of a grievance.

#### **E. Relationships between members of staff**

22. This policy is focused on relationships between members of staff and students; it does not apply to relationships between members of staff. Should a member of staff be in an intimate relationship or close personal relationship, as defined above, with another member of staff, they are asked to disclose this to their Head of Department or if the relationship is with their Head of Department to the Assistant Bursar.
23. In such instances it would not be appropriate to conduct an appraisal of, or interview for a job, someone with whom they are in a relationship. This is in order to prevent the suggestion of

preferential treatment, even if this is unfounded. Should this situation arise, it will be treated with discretion and sensitivity.

24. If a member of staff has a concern relating to relationships between members of staff they should raise the matter with the Assistant Bursar.

#### **F. Conclusion**

25. This Policy enters 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.