

Appropriate Academic Relationships Policy

This policy applies to everyone working for the College in an academic role where they have responsibility of any sort for the student. Students are included both as staff members (for example if supervising an undergraduate) and as students (for example in relation to their own supervisor). Those academics who are also employees of the college should read this policy in conjunction with the Employee Handbook. All those working for the College should also be aware of the College's Safeguarding Policy. Further advice can be sought from the Senior Tutor if needed.

This policy aims to:

- inform those working for the College of the standards the College expects, and of the likely consequences of any failure to meet these standards
- assist the College in dealing promptly and effectively with issues involving close personal relationships within the College community in a fair and consistent way, maintaining confidentiality where possible.

Hughes Hall regards the professional relationship between those working in an academic role and a student as critical to the student's educational development. Professional relationships are those involving teaching, learning, assessment, selection, advising on research, mentoring and other forms of personal support, administrative oversight and technical advice. This policy covers situations where the professional relationship develops a romantic or sexual aspect however brief, either in person or remotely (for example, via social media, email or text messaging). Any romantic or sexual relationship between someone in an academic role and a student raises serious questions of conflict of interest, equality of treatment and abuse of authority. It may damage the teaching and learning environment for other students and staff, and may pose a risk to the College's reputation.

Implicit in the professional status of having an academic role is a moral obligation to ensure that such conflicts of interest and risks do not arise, and that relationships with students for whom someone has direct responsibility in any way remain strictly professional in nature. There is a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interest of students in this way, to respect the trust inherent in the relationship, and accept the constraints.

All those working in academic roles are strongly advised not to enter into any romantic or sexual relationship with a student whom they are responsible for teaching, assessing, advising or supporting; nor to accept any new responsibility for a student with whom they have an existing relationship of this kind. The College recognises, however, that such relationships may have existed in the past and do develop occasionally, sometimes of long duration. In such circumstances, the person in acting in an academic role has a responsibility to notify a superior (such as Director of Studies, the Senior Tutor or President) of the situation in confidence. This person will try to assess the best means of protecting the interests of both parties, consulting in confidence as necessary for this purpose. Wherever practicable, the outcome will involve the removal of direct professional responsibility for and contact with the student and will always involve withdrawing from writing references and letters of recommendation for the student in question. A written note of the action adopted will be agreed and retained.

The existence of such a relationship is not in itself grounds for any disciplinary action, but failure to report it may be grounds for such action.

Reciprocal obligations apply to students not to enter into any romantic or sexual relationship with someone with academic responsibility for them. Student finding themselves in such a relationship may wish to consult a Tutor, Director of Studies or Supervisor, particularly if concerned that it may not have been disclosed by the other party. If they do not consider their involvement in such a relationship to be consensual, they may take action under the University's Policy on Dignity at Work and Study: Students or the College's Code of Practice for Student Grievances, as appropriate.