

<p><b>Relationships between students and staff</b></p>	<p>Created: 2024 Last updated: Feb 2024 Approved by: GB 07.02.2024 Policy owner(s): Senior Tutor, HR Manager</p>
<p><b>Policy</b></p>	<p>Issue version: 1</p>

### POLICY CONCERNING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND STAFF

1. This policy concerns consensual relationships. Sexual harassment is dealt with under Somerville College’s Policy on Harassment [<https://www.some.ox.ac.uk/life-here/health-and-welfare/>]. Staff who are also employed by the University are also bound by the University’s staff/student relationships policy (<https://hr.admin.ox.ac.uk/staff-student-relationships> ).
2. Relationships between staff members are dealt with under Somerville College’s staff relationships policy, in the employee handbook. For the avoidance of doubt, where a student is also a member of staff (such as in the case of casual bar staff), their student status will take precedence and this policy will apply.

### Definitions

3. **Students:** This policy applies to all undergraduate and graduate students of Somerville College while they are undertaking a course of study, or while they are intermitting their studies.
4. **Staff:** This policy applies to all Fellows of Somerville College, including emeritus and honorary Fellows, and to all members of staff employed or engaged by Somerville College on a permanent or casual basis, whether in a stipendiary or non-stipendiary role, who have responsibility for students of Somerville or any other students from the collegiate university.
5. **Responsibility:** ‘responsibility’ for a student includes any direct teaching, professional, pastoral, or administrative responsibility for or authority over a student, whether temporary or permanent. It includes but is not limited to lecturing, teaching, overseeing projects of fieldwork, supervising, and setting and/or marking of examinations or other assessments, and the admission or selection of applicants. It also includes acting as a mentor or college adviser. Responsibility within the meaning of this policy does not include support or assistance given by one graduate student to another.

## **Policy**

6. Somerville College recognises the value of positive professional relationships between students and members of staff. Such relationships are central to students' educational development and welfare. However, sexual or romantic relationships between students and staff who have responsibility for them can cause significant problems because of conflicts of interest, the imbalance of power and authority, perceived favouritism, and the emotional or practical consequences of relationships coming to an end. Staff have a responsibility to act in a way that protects and promotes student welfare, and that does not damage the reputation of the College.
7. Staff must not engage in sexual or romantic relationships with any students for whom they have responsibility. Staff must not engage in relationships with students for whom they have responsibility that result in the student becoming financially dependent on the member of staff. If staff become aware that there is a significant possibility that any such relationship may develop, they must declare the situation promptly to the Senior Tutor ([senior.tutor@some.ox.ac.uk](mailto:senior.tutor@some.ox.ac.uk)) or the Human Resources Manager ([hr.manager@some.ox.ac.uk](mailto:hr.manager@some.ox.ac.uk)) and must cease to exercise any responsibility for the student in question.
8. Staff are expected to exercise professional judgment as to the appropriate limits of their personal relationships with all students, with due regard to the risks and their responsibilities outlined above, as well as the risks of the perception of harassment. Even where a staff member does not have and is not likely to have responsibility for a student, staff are strongly encouraged to be cautious before embarking on any sexual, romantic, or close personal relationship with any student. Such relationships may give rise to complaints or concerns rooted in real or perceived inequalities of power, accusations of bias, favouritism or exploitation, adverse effects where a student becomes practically or emotionally dependent on a member of staff, and questions about the nature of consent. The risks of such complaints are likely to be heightened where there is a significant age difference between the staff member and the student; where the student is taking their first degree; and/or where the student is particularly vulnerable. Staff should consider whether such a relationship should be declared to the Senior Tutor or the Human Resources Manager.

## **Information-sharing**

9. The College reserves the right to share information about any relationships falling within the scope of this policy with the University, another College, or any public or regulatory authority where it is appropriate and necessary to do so for a legitimate reason including without limitation the protection of student welfare, compliance with any regulatory or legal obligation, or protection of the reputation of the College. Any necessary information sharing would be carried out in accordance with the college's Data Protection Policy.

## **Breaches**

10. Breaches of this policy constitute misconduct and the College disciplinary process will be followed, which may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.