BALLIOL COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Policy Concerning Relationships Between Students and Staff

1. Introduction

Balliol College recognises the value of positive professional relationships between students and Tutors and members of College staff. Such relationships are indeed central to students' educational development and welfare. In certain cases, however, relationships between students and those who have a responsibility for them can prove problematic. Fellows, Tutors, Lecturers, and the like, as well as members of the College staff have a duty to act in a way that protects and promotes student welfare, and that does not damage the reputation of the College.

1. The coverage of this policy.

This policy applies to:

(i) all undergraduate and graduate students of Balliol College while they are undertaking a course of study, or while they are intermitting their studies; and

(ii) all Fellows of Balliol College, including Emeritus and Honorary Fellows, all Tutors and Lecturers, and all members of staff employed on a permanent or casual basis by Balliol College who have responsibility for students of the College. Members of Balliol College who are also employed by the University are additionally bound by the University's staff/student relationships policy.

2. The meaning of 'responsibility' in this document.

'Responsibility' for a student includes any direct teaching, professional, disciplinary, pastoral, or administrative responsibility for or authority over a student. 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 student to another.

3. The policy concerning intimate and close romantic relationships between staff and students.

This policy concerns consensual relationships. Sexual harassment is dealt with under Balliol College's Code of Practice on Harassment.

(i) Those members of Balliol described in 1(ii) above must not engage in sexual or intimate and close romantic relationships with any students for whom they have responsibility. The

particular application of this policy to Junior Deans, the Assistant Dean, Lecturers, and other roles undertaken by graduate students within this policy is described in section (iv).

(ii) Should someone as described in 1(ii) above become aware that there is a significant possibility that such a relationship may develop, they must declare the situation promptly to the Senior Tutor (in the case of a Fellow, Tutor, or Lecturer) or the Domestic Bursar (in other cases), and they must cease to exercise any responsibility for the student in question.

(iii) Fellows, Tutors and Lecturers, and staff members of the College 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, as well as the risks of the perception of harassment. Even where there is not, and is not likely to be, a specific duty of responsibility, any sexual or close romantic relationship with any student is likely to prove extremely problematic and should be regarded with great caution. Such relationships may give rise to complaints or concerns rooted in real or perceived inequalities of power; to accusations of bias, favouritism, or exploitation; and to the adverse effects created by a student becoming practically or emotionally dependent. 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; or where the student is particularly vulnerable. If such a relationship were contracted, the Fellow, Tutor, Lecturer, or member of Balliol staff concerned should consider whether such a relationship should be declared to the Senior Tutor or the Domestic Bursar.

(iv) In the case of the Assistant Dean, Junior Deans, Lecturers, and GTAs who, as well as filling those roles are also graduate students (whether members of Balliol or otherwise), it is fully accepted that they may well be in intimate and close romantic relationships with other students before their appointment, or might form them during the term of their appointment. In such cases, it is essential that all steps are taken to avoid conflicts of interest or even the appearance of conflicts of interest. It is not practical or desirable that they report all relationships with other students to the Senior Tutor – for example, an undergraduate-facing Junior Dean would not normally be expected to report a relationship with a member of the MCR. But they are required to report any intimate and close romantic relationships that could potentially compromise them, or be seen to compromise them, in their College roles. The Assistant Dean and Junior Deans should report the relationship to the Dean and Welfare Lead, and those involved in teaching or mentoring to the Senior Tutor. Failure to report such a relationship would constitute a serious infringement of this policy.

In so far as it is practicable, the College Officer(s) to whom the report has been made will keep the existence of such relationships confidential, if those involved wish that. However, ad hoc arrangements may need to be made to avoid conflicts of interest and these will be addressed case by case. These may involve, for example, teaching arrangements being made so that people do not teach those with whom they are in such a relationship.

4. The policy concerning other kinds of staff-student relationship.

(i) Those members of Balliol described in 1(ii) above should not engage in relationships with students for whom they have responsibility which are likely to result in the student becoming financially dependent or otherwise significantly indebted to them. If they become aware of the possibility that such a relationship may develop, they must declare

the situation promptly to the Senior Tutor (in the case of a Fellow, Tutor, or Lecturer), to the Dean or Welfare Lead (in the case of Assistant or Junior Deans), or to the Domestic Bursar (in other cases).

(ii) If a member of Balliol as described in 1(ii) above has a familial connection with a student for whom they have responsibility, this should be reported to the Senior Tutor (in the case of a Fellow, Tutor, or Lecturer), to the Dean or Welfare Lead (in the case of Assistant or Junior Deans), or the Domestic Bursar (in other cases).

What action is to be taken will be decided by the College Officer to whom the report has been made. It may be considered appropriate that the reporting member of Balliol ceases to exercise any responsibility for the student in question.

5. Information sharing.

Any information gathered under this policy would remain confidential to the College Officer(s) to whom it has been reported. (As personal data, such information would not be disclosed in response to a FOI request; and any such reference would be redacted under an SAR.) However, 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.

6. Breaches.

Breaches of this policy constitute misconduct which may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

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