Regent's Park College

Policy on Staff-Student Relationships

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the Regents Park College Safeguarding Policy. Safeguarding referrals will be made within 24 hours where the nature of a relationship gives rise to concerns about the safeguarding or protection of an affected party, or where concerns about the 'suitability' of an individual to work in a position of trust arise. Matters that suggest potential criminality will be referred to the Police. Where affected parties require external support services, beyond the skill or resources of the University, external referrals will be made promptly.

Introduction

1. Regent's Park College prohibits close personal and intimate relationships between staff and students wherever that member of staff has *any* academic, administrative, or welfare responsibility for that student.
2. The policy also sets out other measures to assist staff and students in maintaining appropriate boundaries in staff / student relationships. NB Where a student is under 18, all staff / student relating should defer to the Safeguarding Policy and the student's individual risk assessment.

Scope

3. This policy effectively applies to all academic employees, and to all other members of staff, i.e. to all who might be present in any context where decisions are taken regarding the student in question or might have any supervisory role, whether welfare or academic or administrative.
4. The prohibition on close personal and intimate relationships does not apply to graduate students who are employed in teaching or decanal roles. Nevertheless, such graduate students are advised to consider potential conflicts of interest when dealing with students with whom they may have personal relationships, and are also bound by the provision to declare such relationships to their supervisor.

Rationale

5. The maintenance of proper boundaries between staff and students is essential for positive professional relationships which allow both to flourish safely.
6. There are strong reasons why members of College Staff should not engage in close personal or intimate relationships with students of the College. They include
    - 6.1. The potential for conflict of interest, exploitation, favouritism and bias which means that such relationships may undermine real or perceived integrity of the educational and College processes.
    - 6.2. The power imbalances between the individuals, resulting in an asymmetric relationship, potentially aggravated if one party has academic authority, for example giving tutorials, grades, recommending for prizes/awards or writing references for the other.
    - 6.3. Such relationships may give rise to ethical concerns over the validity of consent and may often be less consensual than the individual whose position confers authority believes. In addition, circumstances may change, meaning that conduct that was previously welcome may become unwelcome. Even when both parties have consented at the outset to a close personal or intimate relationship, this past consent does not remove potential grounds for a

complaint based upon subsequent unwelcome conduct, either during the relationship or after it has ended.

6.4. Such relationships may also have unintended, adverse effects on the academic environment, thereby impairing the learning environment for others, and undermining trust and integrity of teaching and learning within College. This may apply both during such a relationship and after any break-up.

6.5. For all these reasons, *this policy prohibits relationships between any member of staff and students – where the member of staff has any academic, administrative, or welfare responsibility for that student.*

6.6. Students who enter close personal or intimate relationships with a member of staff covered by this policy do not have a duty to declare it (the onus to do so is on the member of staff), but are encouraged to report it or raise any concerns or request for support with College Officers or members of the welfare team, and will not be subject to any disciplinary process for doing so. Students may also seek support in appropriate cases from the University's Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service.

Further provisions

7. In order to maintain appropriate relationships with students and set appropriate boundaries in these relationships, and to help reduce the risk of sexual misconduct, abuse of power, or conflict of interest, *staff should note the following*.

7.1. Communications

7.1.1. Wherever possible communication with students should be by academic email addresses or platforms. Staff are reminded that any email sent to a student, or a colleague about a student, may be disclosed to the student or their legal representative, for example under data protection law.

7.1.2. Communication with *individual* students via social media platforms is usually inappropriate, though in some circumstances it may be acceptable to be part of a social media group with students.

7.1.3. Mobile phone calls and SMS messages are not normally appropriate, aside from emergencies. In these cases a work mobile should be used or the time and content of the phone call/ SMS should be logged.

7.1.4. only appropriate on academic matters, or in more urgent welfare contacts.

7.1.5. Communication with students (with the possible exception of email) should normally take place within working hours.

7.2. Other

7.2.1. Staff should avoid creating, or giving the appearance of creating, special friendships with individual students.

7.2.2. Normally meetings and discussions with individual students should occur in College or in other University premises. Where this is not possible, they should ensure that the meeting occurs in a public venue, such as a library or a café.

7.2.3. Visits of an individual student to a member of staff's private home, with or without other adults present, is not normally appropriate.

7.2.4. Staff should not accept gifts from a student, unless it is following final assessment completion and deemed to be a minor token of thanks in accordance with the college's gift policy.

7.2.5. In the case of students with particular support needs, they should be referred to a relevant College Officer or University support service and staff should limit their role in providing personal support to a student where this is not part of their normal duties.

7.2.6. If an intimate or close personal relationship is pre-existing between any member of staff who has a role in selection of candidates or admission of students to the college and a candidate seeking admission, that member of staff must inform the Tutor for Admissions immediately it is known that the student in question is a candidate.

7.2.7. If an intimate or close personal relationship is pre-existing between a member of staff and a student for whom they are subsequently asked to take responsibility, they must declare the relationship and alternative arrangements must be put in place.

7.3. The nature of staff / student relationships sometimes means that the maintenance of appropriate boundaries is not always straightforward. Members of staff should feel able to talk candidly and confidentially with a trusted colleague about students with whom they work and where normal boundaries have been tested for one reason or another.