

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS POLICY

Introduction

1. The College recognises the importance of a friendly, supportive learning environment where staff and students can learn from shared experiences and foster long-lasting professional relationships. Staff are encouraged to be active members of the RCM community and engage positively with students. However, the nature of staff and student relationships brings responsibilities around appropriate boundaries and behaviours.
2. This policy is intended to be a comprehensive source of information providing clarity around personal relationships to protect staff and students from misconduct and real or perceived abuse of power or conflict of interest.
3. Related policies include:
 - Code of Practice for Teaching
 - RCM Student Codes & Procedures
 - Physical Contact in Teaching
 - Child Safeguarding Policy
 - Behaviour at Work

Relationships between staff and students

4. The College understands that staff and students are likely to interact socially outside College for example when taking part in external performance opportunities or engaging in social or leisure activities. The College doesn't seek to discourage these relationships but cautions that staff need to give careful consideration to potential conflicts, professional norms and boundaries and to how any such behaviour might be perceived.
5. Members of staff must be mindful of professional boundaries in all relationships with students, not just those students for whom they have direct responsibility. Staff must consider the potential for an actual or perceived imbalance of power or authority, accusations of bias or exploitation.

Intimate Relationships

6. Members of staff are prohibited from having intimate relationships with students. Such relationships will be considered a disciplinary matter.

7. Where an intimate relationship between a member of staff and a student is identified, there will be a risk assessment and alternative arrangements for the student's learning and assessment put in place, in addition to any disciplinary action.

Close Personal Relationships

8. Examples of other behaviours that would be unacceptable between staff and students include:
 - any form of dependence, whether emotional, practical, financial or otherwise, and whether the student appears dependent on the member of staff.
 - favouritism towards any student arising from a close personal relationship (which might include, for example, circumstances where a student is treated in a way that is exclusive or exceptional).

Pre-existing Relationships

9. The College recognises that there may be instances of pre-existing relationships between students and staff or between members of staff. In these instances, the relationship should be declared and will be subject to a risk assessment process.
10. Where a person becomes a staff member and they have a pre-existing close personal or intimate relationship with a current or incoming student, or another member of staff, they will be required to declare this at the point of accepting an offer of employment.

Audition Panels

11. It is the responsibility of the member of staff to declare existing close personal relationships or intimate relationships or family relationship with prospective students. To avoid any perception of bias or favouritism the member of staff will most likely be removed from the panel. For the purpose of this policy, 'staff' in this context includes panel members not directly employed by the College.

Relationships with students or staff under the age of 18 or who are an "adult at risk"

12. This policy strictly prohibits intimate relationships with a student or any other person under 18 years of age or with a student who is an adult at risk (see definitions at the end), irrespective of whether the member of staff has any responsibility for the student or other person.
13. Staff are reminded that intimate relationships involving students (including applicants or offer-holders) under the age of 18 where the staff member is in a position of trust or where the student is an adult at risk could fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Act (2003).

Relationships between members of staff

14. Personal intimate relationships may exist or may develop between members of staff. If one of the members of staff is or will be responsible for directly or indirectly managing the other, the member of staff in the managerial role should declare the relationship without delay to their line manager.
15. This also applies where one of the individuals is a contractor or consultant and the other member of staff is responsible for that contractor's/consultant's work.

16. The College reserves the right to make arrangements to discontinue the situation of a member of staff being responsible for managing the work of the other. Any measures taken would be in full consultation with the members of staff concerned and would be with a view to reaching agreement.

Staff Recruitment

Job Applicants

17. All job applicants are expected to declare existing close personal relationships or intimate relationships with a current member of staff or an RCM student.
18. Applicants for teaching roles will be asked if they have ever been subject to informal or formal investigation at a previous workplace resulting from an intimate relationship with a student.

Shortlisting and Interview Panels

19. Current RCM members of staff involved in the recruitment process are expected to declare close personal relationships or intimate relationships with prospective applicants as soon as possible and will ordinarily be removed from the shortlisting and interviewing processes.

Cessation of a declared close personal or intimate relationship

20. In the event of the cessation of an intimate relationship, the staff member has the responsibility of notifying the College so that records can be appropriately maintained.

Definitions

Abuse of power is where someone uses their position of power or authority in an unacceptable way resulting in someone doing something, or refraining from doing something, that they may not have otherwise done. Abuse of power can take various forms and may include but is not limited to grooming; manipulation; coercion; putting pressure on others to engage in conduct they do not feel comfortable with; selective treatment that excludes others.

Adult is any person who has attained the age of 18

Adult at risk is someone aged 18 years or over who may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

Child is any person who has not attained the age of 18.

Close personal relationships excludes intimate relationships, but means a relationship such as a relative or close family friend, or a relationship where there is financial dependence.

Capacity to consent is whether someone is physically and/or mentally able to make a choice and to understand the potential consequences of that choice. The capacity to consent may be affected, inhibited or removed by the influence of drugs or alcohol, or by mental health conditions, or by cognitive or learning difficulties.

Conflict of interest is when someone's personal interests such as family, friendships, relationships, financial, or social factors, may compromise their judgment, decisions, or actions.

Intimate relationship is a consensual relationship characterised by emotional, physical, and/or sexual 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.

Member of staff includes employees of the College, casual workers (not including student casual workers, who for the purpose of this policy are principally students), visiting or honorary staff, anyone working within the College under a contract for services and/or in a self-employed capacity. Postgraduate students engaged as Graduate Teaching Assistants are considered members of staff for the purpose of this policy.

Physical contact in teaching between professor and student is sometimes necessary for the student's learning (e.g. to correct poor posture or to adjust bow hold). Its purpose and form should be explained to the student by the professor and the student's consent obtained in advance of physical contact taking place. In this context, as in all others, a professor should be sensitive to feedback from their student and should respond accordingly. More detail is available in the Code of Practice on teaching.

Position of trust, any member of staff working closely with students is in a position of trust

Power relationship describes the balance of power between two individuals in a particular context. A power relationship can be equal or unequal and can apply to different contexts (e.g. professional/intimate).

Student includes any person currently studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate or research degree qualification, or on any course arranged by or through the College, including visiting and exchange students, applicants, and offer-holders. It includes students from other Higher Education providers who are completing placements at the College.

The Junior Department has a child protection policy which applies to all of its students.

Approved by RCM Council 2 July 2025