



Oakswood College

Empowering Through Education



Personal Relationships

Policy

PROMOTING EXCELLENCE • ENSURING COMPLIANCE
SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY



GOVERNANCE



QUALITY



COMPLIANCE



EXCELLENCE



Oakwood College
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Oakwood College

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(Trading name of Oakwood Group Ltd)

Personal Relationships Policy

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Oakwood College
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	higher education professional boundaries and safeguarding good practice
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Appendices to this Policy:

Appendix A: Personal Relationships Declaration Procedure

Appendix B: Personal Relationships Declaration Form



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KEY INFORMATION and PRINCIPLES regarding this Policy:

- ◇ This Policy governs Oakwood College’s approach, requirements and expectations concerning close personal and intimate staff-student relationships and staff-staff relationships.
- ◇ It is designed to put effective measures in place that:
 - make the College’s requirements and approach clear, reasonable and supportive.
 - make reasonable efforts to limit the circumstances in which a position of power might be exploitative or abused.
 - manage conflicts of interest in a consistent, fair and reasonable way that acknowledges personal circumstances.
 - protect all parties from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
- ◇ In Section 2 of this Policy, there is a broad definition of ‘Personal Relationship’. In Section 9, you can find Oakwood College’s definitions and clarifications regarding the following:
 - Close personal relationships
 - Intimate relationships.
 - Financial relationships.
 - Other close personal relationships.
- ◇ ‘Staff members’ means all permanent, temporary, freelance, volunteer and guest staff employed in any capacity by the College, including but not limited to security personnel, cleaning staff and other contractors.
- ◇ Staff members hold a position of authority and related trust, and therefore have a responsibility to uphold this position, to declare any personal relationships to ensure they are not compromised or conflicted, and to support the College in managing any actual or perceived conflicts arising from a personal relationship.
- ◇ **In accordance with this Policy, the following relationships are prohibited by Oakwood College:**
 - Intimate relationships between the College staff and students where students are under the age of 18 or are an adult at risk.
 - Inappropriate intimate relationships between the College staff and any student (see Section 8 of the Policy);

- Intimate relationships where the member of staff is directly involved in the academic assessment of the student (including supervision of dissertations/theses).
- ◇ **Staff must always disclose a new or pre-existing close personal or intimate relationship** with:
 - A registered student.
 - An applicant to the College course of study (if known);
 - Another staff member
- ◇ **Students are not required to disclose a Personal Relationship**, though in the spirit of trust and openness, the College welcomes them doing so to ensure that their interests are safeguarded.
- ◇ Where both parties are staff members of equal status, the responsibility for declaring the relationship to the College rests with both parties, and both should declare. Where one member of staff is more senior, the responsibility for declaring lies with the more senior member of staff.
- ◇ If a student is employed as a staff member whilst as a student, they have the same responsibilities as any other staff member regarding declaring any personal relationship.
- ◇ **Oakwood College does not use Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs)** in the event of misconduct or complaint cases arising, or any other cases concerning personal relationships.
- ◇ **Failure by staff to disclose a Personal Relationship in accordance with this Policy** will be considered a breach of this policy. Therefore, it will normally result in referral to the College's HR staff disciplinary procedures and **may result in disciplinary action.**

Personal Relationships Policy

Introduction, Purposes & Scope

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Oakwood College values all members of its community equally; staff and students are not regarded as more or less important because of their role or status. However, there is an inherent imbalance of power between staff and students, and within institutional hierarchies.
- 1.2 This means there is a risk of actual or perceived misuse of power in any intimate or personal relationship between individuals in significantly unequal positions, where one is expected to carry out teaching, training, supervisory and/or pastoral responsibilities for the other. This principle applies both to staff–student relationships and to staff-only professional relationships within the institutional hierarchy.
- 1.3 The College also recognises, however, that personal relationships can exist prior to a staff member or student joining the College community, and that they can also arise during an individual’s time with us. We further recognise that in our context, members of our college are usually adults and always above the age of consent. We therefore encourage a culture of trust and an approach of openness and transparency, with sensitivity and appropriate safeguards to manage any potential, perceived or actual conflicts of interest in the event that these arise, rather than an overall prohibitive stance to personal relationships in the College.

2. Definition of ‘Personal Relationship’

- 2.1 Under this policy, the term ‘Personal Relationship’ means both:
 - intimate (romantic) relationships between parties, and also
 - close personal relationships.
- 2.2 Close personal relationships might include circumstances, for example, where two parties are related to each other; where one person is the legal guardian of another, or where a person is acting in the capacity of a parent or guardian. Former couples who both work at Oakwood College but share children would also be deemed to have a close personal relationship. (These examples are not exhaustive.)

3. Purposes

3.1 The purposes of this policy are to:

- protect both students and staff from actual or perceived conflicts of interest, abuse of power, or professional misconduct;
- ensure that all members of the College community maintain professional boundaries and trust in educational and workplace settings.
- make reasonable efforts to limit and mitigate the circumstances in which a position of power could be abused.
- put processes in place to achieve these aims.

4. Scope

4.1 This policy covers all staff and students of Oakwood College. For clarity:

- **Staff** refers to all individuals employed or contracted with Oakwood College, whether on a permanent or temporary basis, including freelance/guest/visiting staff, and regardless of whether they are student-facing or hold a teaching position.
- **Students** refer to all individuals holding current registration as a student of Oakwood College, whether enrolled or not.

Key Principles and Conflicts of Interest

5. Key Principles

- Staff are in positions of trust and must uphold professional boundaries at all times.
- Whilst a young person can consent to sexual activity once they are 16 years of age, the [Sexual Offences Act \(2003\)](#) makes it a criminal offence for an adult in a position of trust (see Section 3, 'Definitions') to engage in sexual activity of any kind with a person under the age of 18.
- Students, especially those under 18 or considered adults at risk, may be particularly vulnerable to power imbalances. Procedures are therefore in place to manage any conflicts of interest for the protection of all parties.
- All staff (permanent, temporary, freelance, or guest) are expected to behave professionally and avoid any relationship that could undermine trust or fairness.

6. Conflicts of interest

6.1 Conflicts of interest covered by this Policy include both actual and perceived conflicts of interest. Perceived conflicts of interest can, in some circumstances, be as harmful to

individuals as actual conflicts of interest. To help Oakwood College protect its staff and students, and to avoid and manage conflicts of interest that may compromise, obstruct or prevent any of its activities, all staff members are required to disclose the following:

- Where there is a pre-existing personal or intimate relationship with another member of Oakwood College staff.
- Where a staff member enters an intimate relationship with another member of Oakwood College staff.
- Where there is a pre-existing personal or intimate relationship between a staff member and any student(s).
- Where a personal or intimate relationship comes to exist between a staff member and any student(s).

6.2 In order that the College can discharge its duty of care appropriately and consistently, such disclosures should be made regardless of whether or not an individual perceives there to be a conflict of interest.

7. Management of conflicts of interest

7.1 If circumstances arise where a member of staff is in a personal or intimate relationship with an undergraduate student who is aged 18 years or older, the College's position concerning the continued employment position of the member of staff (including consideration of changes to duties/contractual terms and conditions, possible breach of the Staff Code of Conduct will be initially referred into the procedure set out in the appendices to this policy. Where possible and appropriate, the College may reach its final decision under that procedure, unless referral into another process is necessary.

7.2 In cases of potential or alleged serious contractual breaches (such as those which might reasonably result in termination of employment), such cases will normally be investigated under this Policy's Declaration of Personal Relationships Procedure (see Appendix 1 to this Policy) and then referred to the appropriate procedure (e.g. Staff Disciplinary Procedure).

7.3 Where relevant relationships do occur, the staff member will normally be temporarily removed, without prejudice, from all responsibilities that may entail a perceived or actual conflict of interest and/or abuse of power, to allow Oakwood College to decide the way forward.

8. Prohibited Relationships

8.1 Not all personal relationships are prohibited. Oakwood College recognises that circumstances may arise where there are pre-existing relationships between individuals,

both personal (e.g., people being related) and/or intimate (e.g., people being in a romantic relationship), and that this is acceptable provided that any conflicts of interest are appropriately managed and relevant mitigations are in place.

8.2 However, to ensure we can meet our Safeguarding obligations and duty of care to our staff and students, the following relationships are prohibited at Oakwood College:

- Intimate relationships between staff and students under 18 or adults at risk.
- Intimate relationships between staff and students they directly supervise or assess.
- Inappropriate intimate relationships between staff and any students.

8.3 Oakwood College considers intimate relationships between staff and students to be inappropriate in the following contexts:

- A relationship where, on the balance of probabilities, there is an abuse of power by the staff member.
- A relationship where the student may reasonably be classed as vulnerable (from a Safeguarding perspective).

9. Definitions and Types of Relationships

9.1 This policy specifically addresses relationships that could impact professional boundaries or create a conflict of interest.

Personal/Intimate Relationships

- **Definition:** Personal or Intimate Relationships includes romantic, sexual, and non-romantic intimate/personal relationships.
- **Policy:** Staff members are **prohibited** from entering into personal, romantic, or sexual relationships with students for whom they currently have, or are likely to have, any form of professional responsibility (e.g., teaching, supervision, assessment, pastoral care, disciplinary oversight).
 - Even where no direct professional responsibility exists, staff should consider the potential for perceived conflict of interest or damage to the College's reputation. Such relationships are strongly discouraged.
 - Where a relationship previously exists before one or both parties becoming members of Oakwood College, conflict management procedures will be put in place as feasible, reasonable and appropriate, unless circumstances prohibit

Oakwood College from doing so (e.g. in the event of Safeguarding concerns overriding such feasibility).

Close Familial Relationships

- **Definition:** This includes relationships with immediate family members (e.g., spouse/partner, child, parent, sibling) or other close relatives. This also includes relationships where an individual is acting as a parent, whether they are declared a legal guardian or are performing in this capacity without any formal/legal recognition.
- **Policy:** Staff must declare any close familial relationship with a student if that student is, or is likely to be, under their professional responsibility (this includes staff who would not have academic responsibilities, but who would have the general staff duty of care). While not prohibited, necessary steps will be taken to manage potential conflicts of interest.

Financial Relationships

- **Definition:** This includes any financial arrangement between a staff member and a student (e.g., loan, business partnership, significant gift).
- **Policy:** Staff are **prohibited** from entering into financial relationships with students that could lead to financial dependency, exploitation, or the perception of undue influence. However, this does not apply to legitimate, transparent transactions such as a staff member purchasing items from a student business publicly advertised to the general public, provided no exploitation or conflict of interest arises.

Other Close Personal Relationships

- **Definition:** This includes friendships or other close personal connections not covered above, where the closeness of the relationship could compromise professional objectivity.
- **Policy:** Staff should exercise caution and declare any such relationship if the student is, or is likely to be, under their professional responsibility.

10. Applicants to a course of study with Oakwood College

- 10.1 This policy also covers applicants to a course of study with Oakwood College, insofar as any actual or perceived conflict of interest will be considered when reviewing an application. No applicant will suffer any detriment as a result of such consideration; Oakwood College will simply consider, in the event of determining that an offer of study should be made, whether any additional measures would need to be implemented to

remove/mitigate any conflict of interest. If so, Oakwood College will ensure these are put in place during the student's registration.

Declaring Personal Relationships: Responsibilities and Requirements

11. Responsibility to declare

- 11.1 Staff have a responsibility to declare whether they have a close personal or intimate relationship with another member of Oakwood College (whether staff or student), regardless of the wishes of the other party. Please see Appendix 1 Declaration of Personal Relationships Procedure for further information.
- 11.2 Where a person becomes a staff member, and they have a pre-existing close personal or intimate relationship with a current staff member, both the new staff member and the current staff member have a responsibility to ensure the relationship is declared.
- 11.3 Where staff are unsure as to whether they have a close personal or intimate relationship with another staff member or a student (either a current or an incoming new student), they should seek advice from their line manager or the Head of Operations and HR. Staff are particularly encouraged to seek advice if the other party expressly does not wish for the relationship to be reported to Oakwood College.

Staff-staff relationships

- 11.4 Where both parties are staff members of equal status, the responsibility for declaring the relationship to the College rests with both parties. Where one member of staff is more senior, the responsibility for declaring lies with the more senior member of staff.

Student-Student relationships and students employed as institution staff members

- 11.5 Students do not have any responsibility to disclose any pre-existing or other personal relationship; however, they are encouraged to disclose this information if they wish. Student - on - student relationships do not fall within the scope of this policy except in the event of a student being employed by Oakwood College as a staff member. In this event, the individual would have the same responsibilities as any staff member and would be required to disclose any relevant personal relationships.

Personal relationships and social media

- 11.6 Oakwood College's policy and expectations regarding personal relationships, as set out above and throughout this policy, extend to behaviour and conduct on social media and online activities, as well as in person. Oakwood College may consider a personal relationship that falls within the scope of this policy to be in place even where it has been

conducted solely online/via social media. Failure to declare such a relationship will normally be considered a breach of this policy and may result in disciplinary action.

Relationships on Placements

- 11.7 Students must behave professionally and avoid intimate relationships with placement supervisors or external staff in positions of authority. Where there is a pre-existing or other personal relationship between a student and a responsible person involved in the placement, students will be encouraged to notify Oakwood College of this. However, our expectation is that the responsible person would notify us of this so that any conflict of interest can be managed to protect all parties.

12. Declaration Requirements

12.1 Staff must declare:

- Any existing or new close personal or intimate relationship with another staff member or student.
- Any personal relationship that could present a conflict of interest, especially during admissions, assessment, or supervision.

12.2 Students are not required to declare relationships but may do so voluntarily.

12.3 Declarations are handled confidentially and may result in adjustments to duties to remove any conflict of interest.

13. Breaches of this Policy

13.1 Failure by staff to disclose a relevant relationship is a breach of this Policy and may lead to disciplinary action.

13.2 Prohibited staff intimate relationships with under-18s or adults at risk are considered a serious breach of this Policy and may involve Safeguarding and/or Prevent referrals, as well as referral into disciplinary procedures for possible gross misconduct.

14. Complaints and Whistleblowing

14.1 Complaints about inappropriate relationships will be handled under the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy.

14.2 Staff and students can report concerns via grievance, complaints, or whistleblowing procedures; such concerns may be referred to other relevant procedures, including those under the Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Harassment & Unacceptable Behaviours.

Non-Disclosure Agreements

14.3 Oakwood College does not use Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) in misconduct or complaint cases, or indeed, other cases concerning personal relationships. Temporary 'no contact' or 'confidentiality' conditions may be imposed in the course of investigating any matters, to allow the investigation to take place without compromising it.

Declaring Personal Relationships, Data Management and Monitoring

15. How to declare a personal relationship to Oakwood College

15.1 Staff must complete the Personal Relationships Declaration Form (Appendix 2 to this Policy) and submit it to the Head of Operations and HR or their Line Manager as soon as they are aware of the need to disclose a Personal Relationship.

15.2 Staff will be asked on an annual basis to either declare that they have no relevant personal relationship to declare to Oakwood College, or to complete/update the Personal Relationship Declaration Form (Appendix 2 to this Policy) and submit it to HR or their Line Manager.

15.3 Where Line Managers receive a Personal Relationship Declaration Form from an employee, they are responsible for forwarding it to relevant HR staff and should confirm in writing to the employee that they have done so.

15.4 Students are not expected or required to declare any personal relationship to Oakwood College, as this responsibility lies with college staff. In the event that a student discloses a personal relationship either about themselves or concerning another student to a member of institution staff that falls within the scope of this Policy, the matter shall be referred to HR to undertake a check against the Register of Personal Relationships and investigate the matter.

15.5 Where a staff member has failed to disclose a relevant Personal Relationship, this may constitute a breach of this Policy and may result in disciplinary action against the staff member.

16. Register of Personal Relationships

16.1 To ensure that details disclosed are recorded appropriately, Oakwood College will maintain a Register of Personal Relationships, which will be reviewed and updated at least annually, and added to on an ad hoc basis in the event of any relevant disclosure.

Personal Relationships and offers of employment

16.2 All offers of employment with Oakwood College will be conditional on providing the requested information regarding any relevant Personal Relationship (see 16.3, below).

16.3 All new staff being offered a position with Oakwood College will be furnished with a copy of this Policy and asked to provide any details of any relevant personal relationship they need to disclose. Such information would not be used to determine whether or not the offer of employment should be withdrawn, but rather, to identify what (if any) conflict management measures may be needed. However, in highly exceptional cases where a conflict of interest cannot reasonably be managed, Oakwood College may withdraw a conditional offer of employment.

16.4 Failure by an individual holding a conditional offer of employment to declare a relevant Personal Relationship that exists at the time of requesting these details may be considered gross misconduct as it breaches the relationship of trust between Oakwood College and the individual and may have wider professional implications. Such failure may therefore lead to either disciplinary proceedings and/or subsequent termination of the contract.

16.5 Under this Policy, staff are expected to declare a relevant Personal Relationship as soon as they are aware of the need to disclose. However, in order to maintain the accuracy of the Register, all staff will be contacted on an annual basis as a reminder to:

1. Declare any relevant Personal Relationships.
2. Provide and update any details in the event of any change in details or circumstance in a previously declared relationship.

17. Monitoring and Data Management

17.1 The Personal Relationships Declaration Form will be stored securely on the staff member's file; relevant necessary information will be held confidentially and any information will only be shared on a strictly necessary basis, in accordance with UK GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) requirements as well as in line with Oakwood College's statutory obligations such as those regarding Safeguarding and the Prevent Duty.

17.2 A register of Personal Relationships will be maintained, in accordance with the Policy, and once this procedure has been concluded, the register should be updated by HR.

17.3 Appropriately redacted data will be reported to and shared with the Board of Governors, normally on an annual basis, for monitoring purposes and to assure them in their stewardship of the College.

18. Support and advice

18.1 Staff are encouraged to seek confidential advice from HR or their line manager if they are unsure whether a relationship needs to be declared.

18.2 Staff should be reassured that Oakwood College will always seek to safeguard the best interests of all parties and thus will seek to put in place any reasonable conflict management measures wherever possible and appropriate.