



## CODE OF CONDUCT ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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### 1. About this code of conduct

1.1 St George's, University of London is committed to the creation and maintenance of a supportive and inclusive environment and aims to provide a working and learning environment which will enable employees and students to fulfil their personal potential.

1.2 It is recognised that in a healthy working environment employees and students form mutually rewarding relationships. This Code provides guidance in areas where personal relationships overlap with working relationships. It seeks to protect the integrity of all employees from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest and to avoid complaints of harassment and grievance or disciplinary action.

1.3 Under this Code the University prohibits personal relationships between employees and students where there is direct supervision. Where direct supervision is not present, the University strongly advises employees and students not to enter into a relationship which may result in a conflict of interest, or which may have influence on the individual's career or employment. However, should such a relationship arise it should be declared in line with the procedure outlined in Section 7.

1.4 This Code describes the expected standards of personal and professional conduct of all employees. Its objective is to promote high conduct standards for the benefit of the institution. When the institution is made aware of a personal relationship covered by this Code, it will consider the appropriate action in a manner that protects the integrity of all parties. The institution will ensure that these matters are dealt with in confidence and as sensitively as possible.

1.5 The Code applies to all employees, including temporary staff and staff employed by Kingston University working in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education.

1.6 In addition, all those contracted by St George's, University of London to deliver a service including consultants, contractors and agency workers are also covered by this Code.

1.7 Employees of NHS Trusts or other organisations which host St George's, University of London students, including those on placements, will be governed by the particular Trust's policies and guidance on appropriate conduct.

1.8 Students studying at St George's, University of London will be signposted to the relevant student policies available on the website.

1.9 Standards for professional relationships need to be upheld at all times. This Code applies to the conduct of employees in the context of their work in reference to:

- involvement in the recruitment of employees, selection of students or the awarding of tenders;
- supervising, assessing and socialising with students;
- line management;
- contract management.

1.10 All employees should adhere to the "Seven Principles of Public Life" drawn up by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, given in appendix A and available [here](#).

1.11 Personal relationships should be declared, as outlined in sections 7 and 8 of this Code. Breaches of this Code could result in disciplinary action.

## **2. Conflicts of interest**

2.1 Employees may be faced with situations where their personal interest conflicts with their duties and they might be uncertain about how to deal with them. Employees must avoid situations which may lead to a potential, perceived or actual conflict of interest.

2.2 Such conflicts of interest may include personal relationships where one party may be in a position to secure advantage for the other in areas such as recruitment, employment, contracts for services or academic life.

2.3 This Code is a set of good practices which will, where considered appropriate, be used as a benchmark in cases where conduct is alleged to have fallen below the expected standards.

2.4 The Code is not comprehensive and it should be noted that behaviour which might be considered to fall outside that described in the Code may also be taken into account in resolving work related disputes.

2.5 If the Code appears to have been breached, contact should generally first be made with the relevant employee's line manager or Director.

### **3. Definition of a personal relationship**

3.1 In the scope of this Code, a personal relationship, which overlaps with a professional one may be defined as a:

- Family relationship.
- Close friendship/social relationship.
- Business/commercial/financial relationship.
- Current or former intimate relationship (including marital, sexual, romantic and/or emotional).

3.2 A personal relationship may occur between an employee and a student, an employee and another employee or an employee and an agency worker/contractor/consultant.

3.3 St George's, University of London recognises that personal relationships may exist or develop within the institution. The university relies upon the professionalism and integrity of its employees. Should an employee conduct a personal relationship, their behaviour must be appropriate. Improper behaviour, abuse of authority, conflicts of interest, or acts of a biased nature will not be tolerated.

3.4 Employees who are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship may seek guidance, in confidence, from their line manager, Director, a member of the Human Resources department (HR) or their trade union representative.

### **4. Relationships between employees and students**

4.1 St George's, University of London believes that the professional relationship between an employee and a student is vital to a student's educational development. The teaching relationship is based on trust and confidence. Employees should recognise a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students,

respect the trust involved in the employee/student relationship and accept the constraints and obligations inherent in that responsibility.

4.2 All students are entitled to equal treatment. Therefore, a personal relationship between an employee and a student must not jeopardise or be perceived as jeopardising that treatment. Such relationships can disrupt the teaching and learning environment for other students and for colleagues. In this context, a professional relationship is defined as one where there is an assessing, supervising, tutoring, teaching or pastoral role, or a role providing administrative or technical support.

4.3 St George's, University of London prohibits personal relationships between employees and students where the employee has a direct responsibility for, or involvement in, that student's academic studies and/or personal welfare.

4.4 To embark on a personal relationship with a student can jeopardise good professional relationships. A personal relationship may involve serious difficulties rooted in unequal power, and hence choice, of the parties concerned, as well as real problems in maintaining the boundaries of professional and personal life.

4.5 Employees may have responsibility for assessing, supervising, tutoring, teaching, offering pastoral care or be required to provide administrative or technical support. Employees who are in a position to influence a student's progression should avoid, for instance, asking a student to run chores for them or accepting or bestowing sizeable gifts.

4.6 Even if the employee is not currently responsible for supervising a student, it is possible that the employee may have these duties in future years or may be perceived as having influence over other colleagues and therefore the student's progression. Employees need to take steps to protect themselves from any allegations of impropriety.

4.7 Problems can also occur if a consensual relationship later becomes non-consensual or a case of harassment (see section 9 below).

4.8 The University is aware that it may be important that employees spend some social time with their students. However even when socialising with students, employees need to be aware that they must maintain professional standards. Employees are advised to adhere to the following guidance:

- think about how they might need to manage their own behaviour to maintain the boundaries of their relationships with students. For instance, it may be a good idea to signal the constraints of the relationship by telling students to contact employees by email rather than phone and provide only work contact details not personal email or phone numbers;

- when choosing to socialise with students, employees are strongly advised not to socialise with just one or two students;
- be aware that it is the employee's role to act responsibly whatever the age of the student;
- not get drunk with students.

## **5. Relationships between employees and other employees or contractors**

5.1 Within St George's, University of London, employees will have a variety of mutually rewarding relationships which will not have a detrimental effect upon colleagues or the good running of the organisation.

5.2 Whilst most social and personal relationships are entirely beneficial in that they promote good working and academic relationships, there are occasions when personal relationships between employees and other employees or consultants, contractors or agency workers may lead to actual or perceived conflicts of interest. There may be potential for a conflict of interest or breach of confidentiality, and the gaining of an unfair advantage may be perceived, with either party being disadvantaged.

5.3 Where personal relationships occur between employees and other employees or consultants/contractors/agency workers, it is the responsibility of both individuals to deal appropriately with potential conflicts of interest. However, a conflict of interest will not necessarily arise from the mere fact of co-membership of a particular Institute or department.

## **6. Recruitment selection: declaration of existing relationships**

6.1 The University recognises that a personal relationship may already exist when an employee is appointed, when a student enrolls, or when an individual applies for a contract or tender. However, these relationships are not a bar to selection for a programme of study or employment with St George's, University of London.

6.2 All external or internal applicants for recruitment/admission to St George's, University of London posts, programmes or contracts are asked to make a declaration

on their admission/application form of any relevant existing personal relationships with employees, students, or members of Council.

6.3 If an employee has a personal relationship with an applicant for a programme of study, a paid position, or a contract, the employee must avoid any involvement in:

- the admissions process of the student;
- the selection process of a job applicant;
- the selection process for a tender or contract;
- acting as a referee.

6.4 This is to ensure that any admission/recruitment/contract decisions are made on an objective and fair basis. It is the responsibility of the employee to inform their line manager/Director of any duties that could give rise to the potential of a conflict of interest without undue delay.

6.5 Where work is being funded by a research grant, before an appointment is made, care must be taken to ensure that the candidate meets the requirements of the role, and any personal relationship to the grant holder or line manager/Director must also be declared by both parties.

## **7. Declaration of a personal relationship / conflict of interest involving a student**

7.1 It is the responsibility of the employee to inform their line manager or Director of any duties that could give rise to the potential of a conflict of interest without undue delay. This is so the employee may separate themselves as far as is practicable from such responsibilities and that alternative teaching, tutoring or assessment arrangements may be made.

7.2 If a personal relationship exists prior to a student's admission to St George's, University of London (including that with any student who is related to a personal friend of the employee), or if a personal relationship develops between an employee and a student during a programme of study, the employee must declare this relationship to their line manager/Director and make arrangements to ensure they are no longer responsible for assessing, progressing or examining the student.

7.3 Failure to declare the personal relationship will make the employee open to charges of bias and may lead to disciplinary action. There will not be a requirement to give details of the personal relationship only to declare that a personal relationship exists.

7.4 Whilst declaring a personal relationship will be treated confidentially, the line manager/Director must seek advice from the Dean of Students, Academic Registrar and/or Human Resources.

7.5 When a personal relationship has been declared, the line manager/Director will arrange a meeting with the employee. St George's, University of London respects an individual's right to privacy in such situations. The purpose of this meeting is to agree positive and constructive practical steps, not to discuss details of the relationship itself. At the meeting the line manager/Director and employee will:

- discuss the potential or actual conflict of interest;
- discuss the impact of this conflict of interest on the professional role that the employee takes;
- determine what, if any, steps may need to be taken.

7.6 The line manager/Director will also ensure that the employee does not have sole responsibility for aspects of the student's work which require judgment or is solely in a position to take decisions affecting the student, for example academic assessment, or the provision or withholding of any of the following:

- facilities for research;
- the allocation of places on courses;
- bursaries or scholarships for research.

All such duties will be carried out in a way that protects the integrity of all parties and processes.

7.7 If the employee directly assesses or supervises the student, the line manager/Director will discuss and review the relevant supervision structure. In such circumstances, consideration will be given to whether it is necessary for another employee to take on some duties or the pastoral care of the student.

7.8 The line manager/Director will also ensure appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential effect of the personal relationship on other employees or students and determine what, if any, steps may need to be taken.

7.9 The Dean of Students and Academic Registrar (or their designated nominee), accompanied by the employee's line manager/Director to ensure a continuity of approach, will also meet with the student to discuss the case and inform them of any agreed outcomes. The student will be expected to comply.

7.10 To protect the interests of all parties, brief written notes of the meetings and action taken (if any) will be made and copies given to both parties as a record. These notes will be held securely on the employee's staff file and/or student's registry file.

## **8. Declaration of a personal relationship / conflict of interest involving another employee or contractor**

8.1 If a personal relationship exists prior to an employee's or contractor's appointment to St George's, University of London or if a personal relationship develops during their employment/engagement, the employee must declare this relationship to their line manager/Director.

8.2 It is the responsibility of the employee to inform their manager or Director of any duties that could give rise to the potential of a conflict of interest without undue delay. This is so the employee may separate themselves as far as is practicable from such responsibilities and that alternative arrangements may be made, if required.

8.3 A conflict of interest is likely where one party in a relationship has direct line management or contract management responsibility for another. Employees in a family/romantic relationship should not, where possible, be placed in a situation where one is in a position of authority over the other or where the integrity of the academic, administrative or institutional processes of the institution could be threatened.

8.4 Failure to declare the personal relationship will make the employee open to charges of bias and may lead to disciplinary action. There will not be a requirement to give details of the personal relationship only to declare that a personal relationship exists.

8.5 Whilst declaring a personal relationship will be treated confidentially, the line manager/Director may seek advice from Human Resources if required.

8.6 When a personal relationship has been declared, the line manager/Director will arrange a meeting with the employee. St George's, University of London respects an individual's right to privacy in such situations. The purpose of this meeting is to agree positive and constructive practical steps, not to discuss details of the relationship itself. At the meeting the line manager/Director and employee will:

- discuss the potential or actual conflict of interest;
- discuss the impact of this conflict of interest on the professional role that the employee takes;
- determine what, if any, steps may need to be taken.

8.7 The line manager/Director will also ensure that the employee does not have sole responsibility for aspects of the other employee's work which require judgment or is in a position to take or influence decisions affecting any of the following:

- salary;
- terms and conditions of employment;
- role;
- workload;
- promotion;
- training and development;
- career development and staff appraisal;
- contract for services with the contractor.

All such duties will be carried out in a way that protects the integrity of all parties and processes.

8.8 If the employee is in a personal relationship with somebody they line manage, the line manager/Director will discuss and review the relevant supervision structure and make alternative management arrangements, as required.

8.9 Similarly, if the employee is in a personal relationship with a contractor the line manager/Director will discuss assigning a different management contact. A meeting may also be held between the line manager/Director and the agency worker, contractor or consultant to inform them of and discuss any necessary steps to be taken.

8.10 The line manager/Director will also ensure appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential effect of the personal relationship on other employees or students and determine what, if any, steps may need to be taken. If it is considered unavoidable to inform other employees about the personal relationship in order to explain a change in management arrangements, this will be done only after discussion with the individuals involved.

8.11 To protect the interests of all parties, brief written notes of the meetings and action taken (if any) will be made and copies given to both parties as a record. These notes will be held securely on the employee's staff file.

## **9. Harassment**

9.1 This Code is intended to protect the interests of all parties to the personal relationship within St George's, University of London during and following a personal relationship at work, and to provide guidance in areas where personal and working relationships overlap.

9.2 St George's, University of London has an obligation to ensure that any such personal relationships are entered into on a voluntary basis. At the extreme, these liaisons can jeopardise professional relationships and can result in an abuse of power. Where an employee or student has been coerced into a personal relationship against their will, or forced to continue a personal relationship after it has become non-consensual, it will be treated as harassment. St George's, University of London will not tolerate harassment in any form and employees and students will have the right of complaint. Further information is available in the Dignity at Work and Study policies, available on the website.

## **APPENDIX A – THE SEVEN PRINCIPALS OF PUBLIC LIFE**

The Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the Civil Service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also apply to all those in other sectors delivering public services.

### **1. Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

### **2. Integrity**

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

### **3. Objectivity**

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

### **4. Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

### **5. Openness**

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

## **6. Honesty**

Holders of public office should be truthful.

## **7. Leadership**

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

## Appendix B: Personal Relationships Flow Chart

