

# Code of Conduct on Professional/Consensual Relationships

## Updated March 2011

### 1. The purpose of the Code

The institution aims to provide a working and learning environment which will enable staff and students to fulfill their personal potential. SGUL is, therefore, committed to the creation and maintenance of a supportive and inclusive environment.

It is recognised that in a healthy working environment staff 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 students and staff from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest and to avoid complaints of harassment and grievance or disciplinary action.

**The institution strongly advises staff 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.**

This Code describes the expected standards of personal and professional conduct of all staff and students at SGUL. Its objective is to promote high conduct standards for the benefit of the institution. Good interpersonal relationships are a key component of any productive working environment.

#### 1.1 Who the Code applies to

The Code of Conduct applies to all those who make up the community which is St Georges, University London. This includes:

- All those **employed** by SGUL including temporary staff, sessional workers, attachments, and other users of the institution's facilities. The Code applies equally to staff whether they work full-time, part-time or sessionally.
- All those **contracted** by SGUL to deliver a service including: consultants, contractors and agency workers are also covered by this Code. The induction process will signpost all employed staff to SGUL's Human Resources policies on the portal.
- Staff in NHS Trusts or other organisations which host SGUL students will be governed by the particular Trust's policies and guidance on appropriate conduct.
- Registry will ensure all organisations which SGUL contracts to supervise students on placements are also made aware of the Code of Conduct and the expected standards of behaviour for those supervising students.

All students **studying** at SGUL. will be signposted to SGUL's Student Policies on the portal. by Registry.

#### 1.2 In what situations this Code applies

Standards for professional relationships need to be upheld at all times and this guidance applies to the conduct of staff and students in the context of their work in reference to:

- staff involvement in the recruitment of staff, selection of students or the awarding of tenders
- staff supervising, assessing and socialising with students
- staff line management of staff

### 1.3 A breach of the Code

The 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.

The Code is not comprehensive and it should be noted that behaviour which might be considered to fall outside that described in this Code may also be taken into account in resolving disputes:

- between individuals
- between an individual, or group of individuals, and SGUL.

Staff and students should be aware that a breach of this Code could lead to disciplinary action.

If the Code appears to have been breached, contact should generally first be with the relevant Head of Division or the Secretary & Secretary & Academic Registrar.

## 2. Personal interest conflicts

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

These may include friendships 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.

All members of staff should adhere to the "Seven Principles of Public Life" drawn up by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (please see Appendix A).

### 2.1 Definition of a personal relationship

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

- A family relationship
- A close friendship/social relationship
- A business/commercial/financial relationship
- A current or former intimate relationship (including marital, sexual, romantic, emotional whether heterosexual or same sex relationship).

This may be between:

- an employee and a student
- an employee and another employee
- an employee and an agency worker/contractor/consultant.

SGUL recognises that personal relationships may exist or develop within the institution. SGUL relies upon the professionalism and integrity of its staff and students; should an employee conduct a personal relationship, his/her behaviour must be appropriate. Improper behaviour, abuse of authority, conflicts of interest, or acts of a biased nature will not be tolerated.

## 3. Seeking advice

Staff who are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship, are invited to seek guidance **in confidence**, from the Director of Human Resources, a senior member of the Human Resources team or their trade union representative.

Students may seek advice **in confidence** from the Secretary & Academic Registrar, the Dean of Students or Student Union representatives.

## 4. Relationships between staff and students

SGUL believes that the professional relationship between a student and a member of staff is vital to a student's educational development. The teaching relationship is based on trust and confidence.

SGUL considers that 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.

Members of staff should recognise a professional and ethical responsibility to:

- protect the interests of students
- respect the trust involved in the staff/student relationship
- accept the constraints and obligations inherent in that responsibility.

## **5. Relationships between staff**

Within SGUL, members of staff will have a variety of mutually rewarding relationships which will not have a detrimental effect upon colleagues or the good running of the organisation.

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 staff 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..

Therefore where financial/close friendship/romantic/sexual relationships occur between members of staff, 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 division or department.

## **6. How to handle potential conflicts of interest: student admissions, staff recruitment and applications for contracts**

The institution recognises that a personal or familial relationship may already exist when a member of staff is appointed, when a student enrolls, or when an individual applies for a contract or tender.

### **6.1 Recruitment selection: declaration of existing relationships**

All external or internal applicants for recruitment/admission to St Georges University posts, programmes or contracts are asked to make a declaration on their admission/application form of any relevant existing personal relationships with members of staff, students, or members of SGUL or Council.

However these relationships are not a bar to selection for a programme of study or a paid position at SGUL.

Similarly if a member of staff has a close personal or familial relationship with an applicant for a programme of study, or 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

including for both staff and students:

- acting as a referee
- shortlisting
- forming part of the selection or interview panel.

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

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 must also be declared by both parties.

## **7. How to handle potential conflicts of interest in a supervisory role**

The institution recognises that a personal or familial relationship may already exist when:

- a member of staff has been appointed
- a student has been admitted
- an individual has been awarded a contract or tender.

When the institution is made aware of a relationship covered by this Code of Conduct, 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.

### **7.1 Relationships with students and potential conflict of interest**

To embark on a close friendship/romantic/sexual 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.

Staff may have responsibility for assessing, supervising, tutoring, teaching, offering pastoral care, or be required to provide administrative or technical support.

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

Further, staff should not enter into a close personal, business, commercial or financial relationship with a student which could compromise, or could be perceived to compromise, the objectivity and professional standing of the teaching relationship. So staff who are in a position to influence a student's progression should avoid, for instance:

- asking a student to run chores or to babysit
- giving their mobile or private landline telephone number to a student
- accepting or bestowing sizeable gifts from/to a student.

Problems can also occur if a consensual relationship later becomes non-consensual or a case of harassment (see point 10 below).

### **7.2 Socialising with students**

The Institution is aware it may be important that staff spend some social time with their students. However even when socialising with students, staff need to be aware that they must maintain professional standards. Staff 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 staff by email rather than phone.
- when choosing to socialise with students staff are strongly advised not to socialise with just one or two students
- be aware that it is their role to act responsibly whatever the age of the student
- not get drunk with students

### **7.3 Declaration of conflict of interest involving a student**

It is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform his/her Head of Division of any duties that could give rise to the potential of a conflict of interest without undue delay. This is so the member of staff may separate themselves as far as is practicable from such responsibilities and that alternative teaching, tutoring or assessment arrangements may be made.

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

Failure to declare the relationship will make the member of staff open to charges of bias and may lead to disciplinary action. There will not be a requirement to give details of the involvement.

Whilst the declaration will be treated confidentially, the line manager must seek advice from the Secretary & Academic Registrar and Human Resources.

### **7.4 Meeting with staff member**

The line manager will then arrange a meeting with the employee. SGUL 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 and staff member 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.

### **7.5 Discuss appropriate division of duties**

The line manager will also ensure that the member of staff 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.

## **7.6 Review supervision structure**

If the member of staff directly assesses or supervises the student, the line manager will discuss and review the relevant supervision structure. In such circumstances, the manager to whom the information is disclosed will consider whether it is necessary for another member of staff to take on some duties or the pastoral care of the student.

## **7.7 Minimize effect of relationship on others**

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

## **7.8 Meeting with student**

The Secretary & Academic Registrar (or his/her nominee) accompanied by the staff member's line manager to ensure a continuity of approach, will then meet with the student to discuss the case and inform them of any agreed outcomes of decisions made at the previous meeting between the staff member and their line manager. The student will be expected to comply with reasonable action.

## **7.9 Documentation of agreed action**

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 personal file and/or student's registry file.

## **8. Relationships between staff and potential conflict of interest**

Members of staff are required to declare an interest where a personal relationship gives rise to a reasonable apprehension that a conflict of interest might exist, or that the integrity of the academic, administrative or institutional processes of the institution could be threatened.

Such an apprehension is likely where one party in a relationship has direct line management responsibility for another. Staff in a family/romantic relationship should not, where possible, be placed in a situation where one is in a position of authority – line management –over the other. However, any such actions or decisions will be made in line with the institution's Equal Opportunities Policy.

### **8.1 Declaration of conflict of interest**

It is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform his/her Head of Division without undue delay as soon as actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest arises. There will not be a requirement to give details of the involvement.

### **8.2 Meeting with staff member and line manager**

A meeting will be arranged with the relevant employee and their line manager to discuss:

- the potential or actual conflict of interest
- 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.

SGUL respects an individual's right to privacy in such situations; therefore the purpose of this meeting is to agree positive and constructive practical steps, it is not to discuss details of the relationship itself.

### **8.3 Discuss appropriate division of duties**

At the meeting the line manager will ensure that the involvement of the member of staff in taking or influencing decisions affecting the other person's:

- salary
- terms and conditions of employment
- role
- workload
- promotion
- training and development
- career development and staff appraisal

are carried out in a way that protects the integrity of all parties and processes.

#### **8.4 Review reporting structure**

If the relationship is between a line manager and a member of staff, the manager to whom the information is disclosed will review the relevant reporting structures and make alternative management arrangements.

#### **8.5 Minimize effect of relationship on others**

The meeting will also ensure that appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential effect of the relationship on other staff. If it is considered unavoidable to inform other members of staff about the relationship to explain a change in management arrangements, this will be done only after discussion with the staff members involved. SGUL will ensure these matters are dealt with in confidence and as sensitively as possible.

#### **8.6 Documentation of agreed action**

To protect the interests of all parties, brief written notes of the meetings and action taken (if any) including any review of relevant reporting structure will be made and copies given to both parties as a record of any agreed actions. The staff involved will be consulted and expected to comply with reasonable action.

#### **8.7 How to handle potential conflicts of interest: tenders and contracts**

Where an employee is in a personal relationship with a contractor there is 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.

#### **8.8 Declaration of conflict of interest**

It is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform his/her Head of Division without undue delay as soon as any actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest arises to ensure that it can be minimised. There will not be a requirement to give details of the involvement.

#### **8.9 Meeting with staff member and line manager**

A meeting will be arranged with the relevant employee and their line manager to discuss assigning a different management contact.

#### **8.10 Meeting with agency worker, contractor or consultant**

A meeting may also be held between the line manager and the agency worker, contractor or consultant to inform them of and discuss any necessary steps to be taken.

#### **8.11 Documentation of agreed action**

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 of any agreed actions. The staff involved will be consulted and expected to comply with reasonable action.

**9. Summary of action which needs to be taken**

**Staff member declares personal relationship with student/staff member/contractor  
in confidence to line manager**



**Line manager seeks advice from Human Resources  
and in cases involving a student also the Secretary & Academic Registrar**



**Line manager meets with staff member  
and in cases involving a student Secretary & Academic Registrar meets with the  
student**



**Discussion of appropriate division of duties**



**Review of reporting structure**



**Discussion of any action needed to minimize effect of relationship on others**



**Document all agreed action**

**10. Harassment**

This policy is intended to protect the interests of all parties to the relationship within SGUL during and following a relationship at work, and to provide guidance in areas where personal and working relationships overlap.

SGUL has an obligation to ensure that any such 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 relationship against their will, or forced to continue a relationship after it has become non-consensual, it will be treated as harassment. SGUL will not tolerate harassment in any form and students and staff will have the right of complaint under SGUL's Dignity at Work and Study Policy (see the portal under human resources: policies and procedures and student centre: policies and procedures).

## **Appendix A**

The Seven Principles of Public Life which should apply to all in the public service - *from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1995.*

### **1. Selflessness**

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

### **2. Integrity**

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

### **3. Objectivity**

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

### **4. Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

### **5. Openness**

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

### **6. Honesty**

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

### **7. Leadership**

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

KH/ updated March 2011