

## **Appendix 4: Code of Conduct on Professional Relationships**

Members of staff may be faced with situations where personal interest conflicts with their duties and might be uncertain about how to deal with them. This code of conduct sets out some principles to guide behaviour in this area. The purpose of the code is to forestall the conferring of unfair advantage or disadvantage on students, staff or other individuals resulting from particular forms of personal, familial or financial relationship. These may include friendships of different types where one party may be in a position to secure advantage for the other in areas such as recruitment, employment, contracts for services and academic life. Third parties may have a legitimate cause for complaint in such circumstances.

### **1 Principles of Public Life**

All members of staff should adhere to the "Seven Principles of Public Life" promoted by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, to which this code relates:

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

#### **Leadership**

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

### **2. Relationships between Staff and Students**

The College values good professional relationships between staff and students. These relationships are heavily reliant upon mutual trust and confidence, and can be jeopardised when a member of staff enters into a romantic/sexual liaison with a student. At the extreme, these liaisons can jeopardise professional relationships and can be an abuse of power.

Problems can also occur when a consensual relationship later becomes non-consensual or a case of harassment.

Such relationships between tutors or college lecturers and their current tutees, whether students at LMH or another college, and advisers and their current advisees, are not permitted because of the clear conflict with professional responsibilities. They will therefore be treated as disciplinary offences. In all other cases the College relies upon the integrity of both parties to ensure that abuses of power do not occur.

The conduct of staff should be based on the following principles:

- Members of staff should recognise a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students, to respect the trust involved in the staff/student relationship and to accept the constraints and obligations inherent in that responsibility.
- To embark on a romantic/sexual relationship with a student involves 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. Such relationships can also disrupt the teaching and learning environment for other students and for colleagues.
- Students who are, or who have been, involved in a romantic/sexual relationship with a member of staff, and who do not consider their involvement to be truly consensual will have the right of complaint under the College's harassment policy.
- The establishment of an academic relationship with family members or with friends or associates who become students also raises ethical and professional issues.

Professional responsibilities of staff towards students may be academic (including assessment), administrative or advisory. If a member of staff has a romantic/sexual relationship with a student of LMH, the member of staff has a responsibility to inform appropriate colleagues and superiors without undue delay and to separate themselves as far as is practicable from such responsibilities with respect to that student. Failure to do so will make the member of staff open to charges of bias and may lead to disciplinary action.

### **3 Relationships between Members of Staff**

Where romantic/sexual relationships occur between members of staff, it is the responsibility of both individuals to deal appropriately with any potential conflicts of interest. It may be necessary to review the relevant reporting structure if the relationship is between a line manager and a member of staff. Any staff member needing advice may approach one of the Harassment Officers, who are best placed to offer informed, informal advice. Staff should take care that financial, familial or personal relationships do not advantage or unfairly disadvantage any member of staff, or other individuals, e.g. applicants for jobs or service providers.

The following should be noted and observed:

- Should such relationships occur the members of staff affected are expected to inform the Bursar, Treasurer, Senior Tutor or Principal as appropriate, as soon as any actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest arises to ensure that it can be minimised.
- The Bursar, Treasurer, Senior Tutor or Principal as appropriate will treat these matters in confidence at all times and will, in consultation with the member(s) of staff, find ways in which conflicts of interest might be avoided.
- If members of staff are working in the same department or section or are in a supervisory relationship and the actual or perceived conflict of interest cannot be

resolved by other means and is interfering with the effectiveness of work, it may be necessary to explore the possibility of one party being moved to another area of work or work location.

- If a member of staff has a close personal or familial relationship with an applicant for employment it would normally be necessary for the member of staff to avoid any involvement in the appointment process e.g. membership of an appointment panel or acting as a referee.
- External and internal applicants for posts are asked to declare relevant personal relationships on the application form for the post.
- A member of staff who is, or who has been, involved in a romantic/sexual relationship with another member of staff, and who does not consider their involvement to be truly consensual will have the right of complaint under the College's harassment policy.

Staff should be aware that a breach of this code could lead to disciplinary action.

This Code may be amended at any time in the light of experience.