



# Professional Standards Policy

## 1. Policy Statement

Oaklands College sets high expectations of all its employees in relation to standards of conduct. The policy sets out professional standards of conduct for all College staff. It gives guidelines to staff in certain situations. It will enable staff to avoid entering into vulnerable situations that could be open to misinterpretation.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees employed by the Oaklands College under a contract of employment, Associates and Volunteers working within Oaklands College.

Whilst this policy clarifies certain situations it is impossible to cover every eventuality. Staff must ask themselves whether they are placing themselves in a vulnerable situation that could result in an accusation of some sort that would lead to inappropriate behaviour. If you have any concerns, then please declare any potentially vulnerable situations to your line manager for your own safety.

## 3. Purpose

To provide a framework for employees to act in a professional and ethical manner at all times. The professional standards are founded on the College's policies and values:

### Pursuing Excellence

- Being a positive role model
- Taking pride in our work
- Constantly striving to improve
- Reflect on our performance
- Sharing best practice

### Working Together

- Being solution focussed
- Doing what you said you would do and when
- Communicating clearly and effectively
- Being flexible and supporting others
- Working collaboratively across the college

### Valuing Diversity

- Treating everyone with respect

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- Valuing the richness diversity brings
- Appreciating others differences
- Challenging unacceptable or unfair treatment
- Treating others as you would want to be treated

### Being Open and Honest

- Taking time to explain why
- Taking ownership of problems
- Giving and accepting constructive feedback
- Being reflective

### Being Innovative

- Asking ourselves 'how could we do this better?'
- Encouraging innovation in others
- Sharing thoughts and ideas
- Be willing to try new things
- Be willing to take a calculated risk

## 4. Principles

### Conduct

In line with our values, your conduct should at all times be professional at work. Your behaviour must represent the standards expected at Oaklands College. In particular you should not behave offensively or violently toward others in any way either physically or verbally. You should not cause any malicious damage to College property.

You should ensure you are aware of the actions that are potentially classed as Gross Misconduct. These are itemised in the College's Disciplinary, Capability and Grievance policies and are available via the intranet.

#### **As an employee of the College, you have a responsibility to:**

- Carry out the duties assigned to you in a diligent manner and inform your line manager of any difficulties you may encounter.
- Familiarise yourself with, and adhere to, College systems, procedures and policies.
- Maintain a proper, professional relationship with our students. Teaching staff should have regard to the professional difficulties which may arise if an appropriate distance is not maintained from students, both inside and outside the College. All Staff must recognise that they are not in an equal relationship with students but are in a position of authority, which should not be abused.
- Staff must declare to their manager any personal relationship between themselves and a student. Such a declaration will be treated sensitively and in the strictest confidence. If the staff member has any professional contact or influence on the student's study at the college, arrangements must be put in place to ensure that any assessment procedures and outcomes will be impartial and without bias. Failure to disclose the existence of such a relationship will result in disciplinary action being considered.

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- Staff must declare any conflict of interest that relates to qualifications delivered by the college. To facilitate this, , all staff will be sent an email each term asking them to inform the exams office if any of the following apply to them:
  - Staff must declare to their manager if they are teaching and/or preparing family members or close friends for a qualification at the college, as the awarding body must be informed.

Exams office staff, including invigilators must declare to their manager if they have members of their family or close friends entered for exams at the college or at other centres

- Staff must declare to their manager if they are intending to sit an exam at the College

For further guidance see [Policy 39a: Suspected malpractice and maladministration by staff](#)

- You need to be aware of your responsibility to safeguard students and the acceptable use of technology. You must not exchange personal mobile or home telephone numbers or personal email addresses or engage in conversation via any social networking sites with students or offer lifts in your private car to students. Failure to comply with this will lead to disciplinary action.
- The College will not condone bullying or harassment and all staff are expected to challenge such behaviour and if concerned report incidents to the relevant line manager and or safeguarding officer.
- Act in a fair and courteous manner to all others with whom you come into contact as a result of your College duties.
- Treat the College environment and its associated resources with respect and ensure that others exercise the same degree of care and respect for our environment.
- Make yourself clearly identifiable as a member of staff to students, visitors and your colleagues by wearing your name badge and identifying yourself and your role whenever you are acting as a member of the college staff and ensuring any visitor is aware of our values and safeguarding requirements to be accompanied at all times and wear a visitors badge.
- Manage the behaviour and conduct of students, visitors and your colleagues - in exercising such responsibility you are expected to deal firmly but politely with any minor incidents of undesirable student behaviour, for example ensuring compliance with the no smoking rule whether or not the students are known to you. All staff should seek support from other colleagues if you feel threatened in any situation.
- Care for the health and well-being of students, visitors and your colleagues. This encompasses the responsibility to rigorously enforce the rules regarding not smoking within the College environment and to set a good personal example for students.
- Be aware of the influence which we exert on students and others with whom we come into contact as a result of our College duties. Therefore, staff should exercise caution with regard to expression of political, religious or ideological opinions in a teaching environment.

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- Familiarise yourself with key College policy documents which, in all your actions as an employee, you must ensure that you are familiar with and adhere to. A full list of college policies and procedures is available on the staff Intranet.
- Please be aware that these policy documents may be revised or amended from time to time in the light of experience or changing circumstances and there will be other policies or guidance which apply to your role, which you are required to observe.
- **You are required to comply with the following College requirements** and also with the terms and conditions set out in your contract of employment with the College with particular reference to:
  - **Criminal convictions or formal police cautions** - You are required to report to the Director of HR in writing any criminal convictions or formal police cautions which are recorded against you during your employment with the College.
  - **Contact with the Media** You may only communicate with members of the press or broadcasting media on behalf of the College or in respect of any matters connected with the College, with the express permission of the Principal and Chief Executive.
  - **Staff Relationships** Any line manager who believes that their work would bring them into a management role with a partner or relative should declare that relationship to their manager. Involvement in appraisals or grievances or disciplinaries with the person declared as a partner or relative should be avoided
- As a member of staff of a publicly funded institution, it is essential that you are seen to observe the highest standards of integrity and probity. Particular vigilance must be exercised in relation to the following matters:
  - **Compliance with Financial Regulations** You are responsible for compliance with the College's financial regulations and for the efficient use of any resources over which you have influence or control; and for managing any staff under your control to ensure that such regulations and procedures are followed.
  - **Declaration of Interest** If you have a financial interest or involvement in a contract, potential purchase or any similar issue being considered by the College, then you must report this in writing to the Finance Director.
  - **Policy for dealing with suspected fraud and Public Interest Disclosure Procedure** In the event that you become aware of or suspect any wrong doing, you have a duty to take action to disclose it directly to an appropriate manager or, if you feel it necessary, in accordance with the Public Interest Disclosure Procedure ("whistle blowing").
  - **Fees** You must declare to an appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team any fee from another body for work related in any way to your College employment. In the event of a fee being offered or paid, you may be required to surrender this to the College.
  - **Gifts and Hospitality** It is important to exercise particular discretion with regard to the acceptance of gifts and hospitality. You should be careful to avoid a conflict of interest. You should always have in mind the need to behave in a manner that avoids giving the impression that you have been influenced in your dealings with others by any gift or consideration.

The following are examples of what is normally acceptable:

- Occasional gifts of a trivial character, such as small gifts from groups of students on completion of their courses, or inexpensive seasonal gifts, such as diaries, calendars and so on;
- Conventional hospitality provided it is normal and reasonable in the circumstances.

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If you are in any doubt about the acceptability of gifts or hospitality, you should raise the matter with a member of the College Senior Leadership Team. You should inform your line manager in writing if you are in receipt of any of the above. The Director of Finance will monitor such declarations on a quarterly basis.

### Dress

The College accepts an individual's choice for their clothing to reflect their culture, religion or beliefs however, it is necessary to ensure that a professional appearance is maintained. Therefore, the individual's style and manner of dress should be suitable for the occupational area within which they are working. Clothing should fully comply with health and safety regulations. Care should be taken with the choice of clothes to avoid offence to others including staff and students.

If an individual's clothing, or their personal hygiene, is inappropriate, the line manager must sensitively inform them about this, as soon as possible.

### Language

Staff should ensure that the type of language used is appropriate to those with whom they are working. Abusive, offensive, discriminative or sexual language should not be used in any form of wording, whether verbal or written. Staff should highlight to students that such forms of language are not permitted. Staff should not use 'over-friendly' or familiar language with students; this will avoid creating the wrong impression.

## 5. Personal Relationships and Social Situations

In order to mitigate against potential conflict of interest all staff are required to disclose any activities, interests, or personal/professional relationships which may raise conflict of interest concerns and to ensure these are managed appropriately and avoided.

Every member of staff has a duty to disclose any potential or actual conflict of interest or a situation which may reasonably lead to a perception of conflict of interest.

The recording of conflict of interest will be centrally held within HR records.

### Intended or accidental

It is recognised that some conflicts may arise naturally. The college actively encourages members of staff to develop external activities and foster relationships and partnerships with outside agencies. Curriculum staff are encouraged to take up activities within awarding bodies as this improves their own professional practice. However, there is a duty to ensure that when conflicts or perceived conflicts of interest become apparent they are acknowledged and disclosed, and in relevant cases, managed properly.

### Staff with Staff

The College is a large community and it is expected that some staff may have personal relationships with each other. In certain situations, potential problems at work can be caused by personal relationships and the College has a duty to protect staff (and students) from such conflicts or favouritism situations.

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The personal relationship could be with partners, spouses, family members, close friends, or boyfriends/girlfriends. Staff members who are in personal relationships must declare this to their line manager, or, if they prefer, to the Director of HR in confidence.

It is not acceptable for two members of staff, in a personal relationship, to be in a work situation where one has supervisory control over another. For example, a manager with a teacher in his/her team, or, a teacher with a student support assistant. If these circumstances arise, it will be necessary to make alternative supervisory arrangements and if necessary, change timetables or departments.

### Teachers with students who are family members

Staff may find that members of their family may attend the College as students. This may cause a problem where the student is enrolled on a course in the same area as the member of staff i.e. in a teacher/student relationship. If this occurs, the member of staff must inform their line manager immediately. Alternative arrangements will be made wherever possible, to verify work etc. to ensure that neither the student nor the member of staff is left in a vulnerable situation.

### Staff with Students in any form of intimate, sexual or affectionate relationship

The College does not permit any member of staff to have any form of intimate relationship with any student that is under 19 years of age. Intimate is a general term to describe any form of affection, intimacy or sexual action, which could be interpreted by the student or another member of staff, as inappropriate.

Staff should be aware that under the Sexual Offences legislation it is an offence for a person over the age of 18 to have a sexual relationship with a child (which in this connection means under 18 years of age and vulnerable adults over the age of 18 years) where that person is in a position of trust, even if the relationship is consensual. Relationships of this type are not allowed and will be subject to disciplinary procedures and may result in dismissal.

When employing new staff members checks will be carried out as part of the DBS process to ensure that any offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (S16) (Abuse of a position of Trust) are considered. They are designed to ensure that sexual offenders are not released into the community if they present a significant risk of serious harm.

Students over 19 years of age are consenting adults and therefore it is impossible to state that staff cannot have relationships with students. The College, however, does not encourage this and feels that staff could become vulnerable and be accused of inappropriate actions. If a staff member is in an intimate relationship of this nature, they must disclose this information to their line manager confidentially, or the Director of HR, if preferred.

### Social situations with students

Students may invite their teachers or College staff to social events. This may be to the pub, out for a meal or to a private party. It is not permitted for any member of staff to attend a social event with students on their own. For protection, there must be more than one member of staff attending the event and staff must have prior permission from their line manager. Staff should agree in advance, arrival and departure times and should arrive and depart together.

If staff are out on personal social events and 'bump' into students, they should be professional and speak to the students, but should not join in with the students or be left alone with them. This is to avoid a member of staff being accused of inappropriate behaviour in a non-College environment. If an incident of this kind does occur, the member of staff must inform their line manager as soon as possible after the event.

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### Staff giving lifts to students

It is not recommended for staff to give a personal lift on their own, in a car, to any student under 19 years of age. Staff should not place themselves in a vulnerable situation and therefore should arrange transport for the student, or ask another member of staff to go with them in the car. If students are waiting for transport at night, it is advisable that at least 2 members of staff should wait with the students. Neither the students, nor the member of staff should be left on their own.

In the event of an emergency, staff should seek to take every precaution to ensure that they do not put themselves in a vulnerable situation. For example, they may be able to telephone a colleague, to inform them of the action that they are taking.

### Staff who wish to raise an informal complaint

Occasionally situations occur where a member of staff feels vulnerable with a student. This may be for any number of reasons, but could involve sexual attraction, harassment, abusive language, or offensive behaviour. The College student behaviour procedure may be used for some of these incidents when they become serious. However, the College needs to support staff before situations become problematic. Therefore, a process has been developed to ensure that the member of staff and the student are protected from victimisation and any form of intimidation.

Any member of staff who feels vulnerable may speak to their line manager or the Director of HR in a completely confidential capacity, to record any particular issue that they wish to raise about a student or another member of staff. The line manager or Director of HR will help the member of staff to deal with the problem as appropriate, or, the incident may simply be placed on personal file as a precaution, should any future situation develop.

### Students in staff offices

Students are not permitted, in normal circumstances, in staff workrooms due to the data protection policy and also, to protect the confidentiality and privacy of staff whilst they are not teaching. Staff should ensure that students do not go into workrooms at any time. If it is necessary for teaching staff to meet with students, they should arrange to meet in an interview room or classroom. In circumstances where staff are also students, they may be allowed into the staff workrooms at the discretion of their teacher but must respect College data protection policies with regards to any information that they may see. If there is no option but to meet students in workrooms, the teacher is responsible for ensuring that all accessible documentation is covered and protected as directed in the College's Data Protection Policy available via the intranet.

### Staff and students in one-to-one tutorials

Staff should ensure that when conducting tutorials that they do not put themselves in a vulnerable situation. Wherever possible, one-to-one tutorials should take place in an appropriate room with viewing panels.

### Drink and Drugs

It is not permitted for staff to be at work in any capacity whilst under the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs or non-prescribed drugs which affect work performance, such as drowsy symptoms. If a member of staff finds themselves in a situation where they need help, they must inform their manager or HR and support will be provided through the most appropriate services. However, staff members that are found to be drinking alcohol, or taking recreational or non-prescribed drugs which have an adverse

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effect on their work performance, will be subject to action under the College's Alcohol and Drugs Misuse Policy and if applicable the Disciplinary Policy. Please refer to the Policies available on the Intranet.

### **Mobile Phone/Social Networking**

It is acknowledged that a good form of communication with students is via a mobile phone and research now shows that students use their phone more than a PC. However, staff should not share their own personal mobile phone number with students as this could result in unnecessary texting or communication during non-working hours that would be inappropriate.

Staff should not give students their personal email or Facebook details. If Facebook or alternative forms of social networking need to be used, a College account should be set up – please refer to the College's Social Media Policy for further details.