

EQUALITY POLICY 2026



1. Overview of Equality Policy

- 1.1 St Stephen's House is committed to fostering an inclusive culture that promotes equality, values diversity and maintains a working, learning and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all its staff and students are respected.
- 1.2 St Stephen's House embraces diversity amongst the members of its community and seeks to achieve equity in the experience, progression and achievement of all students, academic members and support staff through the implementation of transparent policies, practices and procedures and the provision of effective support.
- 1.3 The College recognises that equality should be embedded in all its activities and will seek to promote awareness of equality and foster good practice. St Stephen's House is committed to a programme of action to support its equality policy, to monitoring its effectiveness, and to publishing information on progress towards its equality aims.
- 1.4 In exercising its policies, practices, procedures and other functions, St Stephen's House will have due regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and to the protected characteristics specified within it, as well as other relevant circumstances including parental or caring responsibilities, contract type, and working hours. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 are: age, disability (the definition of disability, as interpreted under the Equality Act 2010, includes a person's ability to participate fully and effectively in working life on an equal basis with other workers, reflecting the Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023), gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status (in employment), pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex and sexual orientation.
- 1.5 In particular, St Stephen's House will:
 - 1.5.1 Encourage applications for study and employment from the widest pool of potential candidates, especially where representation is disproportionately low.
 - 1.5.2 Take steps to meet the particular needs of individuals from protected groups where these are different from the needs of others.
 - 1.5.3 In respect of students, seek to attract applicants of the highest quality and potential, regardless of background. Decisions on the admission of students will be based solely on the individual merits of each candidate and the application of selection criteria appropriate to the course of study.
 - 1.5.4 In respect of staff, ensure that entry into employment and progression within employment are determined solely by criteria which are related to the duties of a particular post and the relevant salary scale; and support career development and progression, where possible in a small organisation, to ensure diverse representation and participation at all levels.
 - 1.5.5 St Stephen's House expects all members of its community to treat each other with respect, courtesy and consideration and does not tolerate any form of bullying or harassment.

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2. Application of the Equality Policy

This policy applies to all members of St Stephen's House community, including students, academic members, support staff, applicants, associate members, and visitors. All members of the College community are expected to act in accordance with this policy and to treat colleagues with respect at all times. All visitors to the College, including contractors, and people operating on behalf of the College, whether on College premises or elsewhere, have a responsibility to behave in accordance with the principles of this policy.

3. St Stephen's House's Commitment

St Stephen's House will:

- 3.1 Seek to embed equality in all its activities;
- 3.2 Have regard to its obligations under relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011, the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 and to note the forthcoming changes under the Employment Rights Act 2025;
- 3.3 Publicise this policy, and any relevant codes of practice and guidance;
- 3.4 Use evidence-based approach where possible to inform its activities to increase equality and to measure the impact of any changes;
- 3.5 Develop equality objectives and an action plan, and report on progress toward attaining those objectives;
- 3.6 Monitor and publish data on its academic members, support staff, students and applicants; and regularly review this policy and all associated codes of practice and guidance;

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Governing Body

The House Council will provide mechanisms through which the University of Oxford and St Stephen's House's strategic objectives for equality and diversity can be determined.

4.2 The Principal

The Principal will provide leadership on equality and diversity and oversee the development of equality policy frameworks and their application in the College, working with College committees (all of which have a remit for equality issues), and relevant colleagues as appropriate. The Principal has overall responsibility for ensuring the College meets its obligations under the Worker Protection Act 2023, with delegation to the Bursar for elements of implementation.

4.3 Finance & General Purposes Committee

The Finance & General Purposes Committee will advise on the development of strategy for work on equality and diversity, covering staff and students and embracing all protected groups. In particular it will:

- 4.3.1 consider existing and emerging equality legislation with a view to identifying relevant issues to be translated into policies appropriate to the College environment
- 4.3.2 provide information and guidance to the House Council and other College members as appropriate to enable them to discharge their responsibilities

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- 4.3.3 work to facilitate communication to and consultation with specific groups of staff;
- 4.3.4 provide monitoring of key strategic issues to the House Council;
- 4.3.5 provide advice on the employment of disabled staff;
- 4.3.6 provide support to students with a disability;
- 4.3.7 work with student representatives and academic members to facilitate communication to and consultation with specific groups of staff.

4.4 Fellows

Fellows are responsible for the day-to-day implementation of this policy and for supporting the delivery of St Stephen's House and the University's strategic objectives for equality and diversity within the College constituency for which they are responsible.

4.5 Managers

All managers are responsible for ensuring that equality is embedded in the work of their team.

4.6 All academic staff

All academic staff should promote an inclusive research and learning environment.

4.7 All support staff and students

All support staff and students have a responsibility to observe this policy.

5. Complaints

St Stephen's House regards any breach of this policy by any member of the College community as a serious matter to be dealt with through its agreed procedures.

The procedures for dealing with concerns about breaches of the policy are set out below.

5.1 Students

5.1.1 Student Applicants

For feedback on admissions decisions, see: Undergraduate admissions:

www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate_courses/why_oxford/codes_and_procedures/feedback.html

5.2.2 Postgraduate admissions:

www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/postgraduate_courses/apply/legal_information/university_policies.html

5.3.3 Current students

Allegations of harassment and bullying are covered by University Policy on Harassment and Bullying. See:

www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/harassmentadvice/policyandprocedure

Complaints about equality and diversity issues related exclusively to college matters should be taken up with the relevant college officers, namely the Principal or Vice-Principal. The College follows the University Policy on Harassment and Bullying, which is supported by the University Harassment Advisory Service. Students remain covered by the University's Harassment and Bullying Policy for harassment

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matters.

Other complaints should be addressed to the Proctors: Complaints Procedures

5.2 Staff

5.2.1 Staff Applicants

Applicants for employment should refer any concerns in writing to the chair of the selection panel in the first instance.

5.2.2 Current staff

Staff with sexual harassment complaints are covered by the College's Sexual Harassment Policy, and the Bursar is the first point of contact for formal complaints.

5.2.3 Sexual Harassment

St Stephen's House recognises that the prevention of sexual harassment is a distinct and proactive legal obligation under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023. The College is committed not merely to responding to incidents of sexual harassment but to taking reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment from occurring in the first place.

The College has adopted a standalone Sexual Harassment Policy, which forms part of this equality framework and should be read alongside this policy. The Sexual Harassment Policy applies to all members of the College's workforce, including employees, workers, agency workers, volunteers and contractors. It sets out the College's definitions of sexual harassment and victimisation, the circumstances covered, reporting procedures, and the disciplinary consequences of a breach.

For the purposes of this policy, sexual harassment is unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It may be committed by a colleague, an agent of the College, or a third party, and may occur in person or through digital means including social media. The College takes its obligations regarding third-party sexual harassment seriously and has put in place measures to protect its workforce from harassment by those outside the College community.

The Principal has overall responsibility for ensuring the College meets its obligations under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 and may delegate elements of implementation to the Bursar. All managers have a proactive responsibility to take steps to prevent sexual harassment within their teams and to respond promptly and appropriately where concerns are raised. All members of the College's workforce are required to complete training on sexual harassment and to conduct themselves in accordance with the Sexual Harassment Policy at all times.

The College will undertake periodic risk assessments to identify circumstances in which members of the workforce may be vulnerable to sexual harassment and will use the findings of those assessments to inform its preventative measures. These measures will be reviewed regularly in line with guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

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Staff who have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment should refer to the College's Sexual Harassment Policy for guidance on informal and formal reporting procedures. The Bursar is the first point of contact for formal complaints. Staff will not be victimised for raising a complaint in good faith.

The College notes that the Employment Rights Act 2025 will, from October 2026, strengthen the duty on employers to take all reasonable steps — rather than reasonable steps — to prevent sexual harassment, and will extend employer liability to cover harassment by third parties across all protected characteristics. The College is committed to reviewing and updating its policies in advance of these changes coming into force.

Other complaints should be handled under the relevant grievance procedure:

6. Review

The House Council, on the advice of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, will review this policy annually as well as in advance of any significant legislative change.

To note: A further review will be required ahead of October 2026 when the Employment Rights Act 2025 changes take effect – this policy and the College's Sexual Harassment Policy will be reviewed together to ensure consistency.

Policy reviewed and updated by St Stephen's House Senior Staff - 24 April 2026.