

Joint Code of Conduct

Document Information

Date of Policy	29 October 2025
Version number	JCC291025
Type of document	Governance Code
Purpose of document	Expectations about the type of behaviours that are necessary for a successful working relationship to exist between Officers, College members, lay people, College staff (employees and workers) and other members of the multi-disciplinary team involved in the work of the College.
Target audience	Everyone
Distribution	On website, Intranet and patients and carers hub
Date of Approval by SMT	
Date of Consultation with Heads Group	29 October 2025
Date of Consultation with SRC	29 October 2025
Author	Director of HR
Latest Review date	October 2025
Review recurrence	3 Years
Date of next review	October 2028

Document Control

Version Number	Reason for Change	Description of Change	Date of Change	Author
JCC120121	Inclusion of values, incorporation of workers and updating font	Including values, incorporating the new roles of workers, and changing font style to new house style within the document.	12 January 2021	Director of HR
JCC250322	Update	Further to the Governance audit there was a need to review RCPsych's Council and Committee code, but as that code is not needed anymore, any reference to it in this document has been removed.	25 March 2022	Director of HR
JCC300125	Update	Incorporation of equity statement and sexual harassment updates.	30 January 2025	Director of HR
JCC291025	Update	Added in section on confidentiality and Artificial intelligence	October 2025	HR Adviser

Joint Code of Conduct

Please note if you require reasonable adjustments to read this policy, please contact hr@rcpsych.ac.uk who can support your request.

Introduction

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (from now on referred to as the “College”) is the professional membership body of psychiatrists. We work to secure the best outcomes for people with mental illness, learning difficulties and developmental disorders by promoting excellent mental health services, training outstanding psychiatrists, promoting quality and research, and being the voice of psychiatry.

The RCPsych has over 21,000 members who are supported through the work of more than 380 staff across the UK and is one of the most influential medical royal colleges. We have played a key role in shaping modern psychiatry and ensuring that our standards of psychiatric practice provide the benchmark of the effective delivery of psychiatric services in the UK and many other nations around the world.

Working together

Since its foundation in 1971, the College has achieved its impact through its members, lay people and staff (employees and workers) working collaboratively as valued colleagues to promote excellent mental health care. Across RCPsych HQ and the RCPsych in the Devolved Nations, the Faculties and Divisions members of the College, lay people and staff work together in unison, respecting each other's expertise and the contribution they make.

Underlying principle

For the RCPsych to continue to operate effectively, it is critical that everyone involved in the organisation treats everyone with whom they work – College members, lay people and staff – with respect and courtesy.

The College has a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment and takes clear steps to educate staff through training and regular communication.

Our Values

Our values underpin everything that we do at the College.

Our values are:

- **C**ourage
- **I**nnovation
- **R**espect
- **C**ollaboration
- **L**earning
- **E**xcellence

As a values-based organisation, in order to ensure the best outcomes for staff, we put equity, diversity and inclusion at the heart of all we do. Equity ensures there is fair treatment, accessibility, and opportunities for everyone, regardless of their protected characteristics. The College recognises that each individual has different circumstances and supports them to ensure they have a fair access to all opportunities.

The RCPsych's Expectations

This document explains the RCPsych's expectations about the type of behaviours that are necessary for a successful working relationship to exist between College members, lay people and College staff.

'College members' means everyone involved in RCPsych activities across the UK including (but not limited to) Honorary Officers, Trustees, members of Council, members of Executive Committees of Faculties, Divisions and Special Interest Groups, Special Advisors and Leads.

Similarly, 'lay people' means everyone involved in RCPsych activities across the UK who are not staff or members of the College.

'College staff' means RCPsych employees and Patient and Carer Representatives.

Behaviours

The behaviours in the document apply equally to working relationships solely involving College members, solely involving lay people and solely involving staff. It also applies to all lay people on all committees, groups and boards across the College.

The RCPsych offices are a professional business environment which may be culturally different from the closer-knit environment with which clinicians are familiar. All who share in the RCPsych's work (as staff, as lay people and as members) are entitled to be treated with the professional respect commonly found in a business environment. The College is also mindful of its obligations as an employer.

To this end we are committed to ensuring that College members, lay people and staff are not subjected to behaviour that may be considered to be out of place in a professional environment or unlawful. We want anyone who genuinely feels they have been subjected to inappropriate behaviour to be empowered to speak out by using the appropriate College policies and procedures, as set out at the end of this document.

The law: The Equality Act 2024

Everyone in Britain is protected by the Equality Act 2024. The “protected characteristics” under the Act are (in alphabetical order):

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Further, in Northern Ireland Section 75 of, and Schedule 9 to, the Northern Ireland Equality Act 1998 should be observed.

What behaviour is unlawful?

Under the Act people are not allowed to directly discriminate, indirectly discriminate, harass, or victimise another person because they have any of the protected characteristics. Instructing, causing, inducing, and helping discrimination is also prohibited.

There is also protection against discrimination where someone is perceived to have one of the protected characteristics or where they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic.

Unlawful behaviours

Some examples of unlawful behaviours are:

- Comments about the way someone looks which they may find demeaning
- Treating someone unfairly because of their marital status
- Indecent remarks
- Touching without permission
- Spreading malicious rumours about someone's sexuality
- Sexual Harassment

It is important to emphasise that although those exhibiting a particular behaviour may intend it to be friendly it is the way that behaviour is perceived by the recipient which normally determines whether it is appropriate.

Unacceptable Behaviours

This section should be read in conjunction with the RCPsych's *Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy and Sexual Harassment Policy*, which concerns bullying and harassment and makes specific reference to all forms of harassment in the context of

working relationships, not only between staff but between RCPsych members and staff.

We have listed below examples of unacceptable behaviours. This is a non-exhaustive list.

Oral and written harassment:

- Verbal abuse of any kind
- Derogatory or abusive comments
- Offensive banter, insults, and taunts
- Emails or any form of written communication that is aggressive, rude, upsetting or which could amount to sexual or racial harassment, or harassment on the grounds of someone's disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or being or becoming transgender. Email harassment can arise simply from unreasonable repeated or unwanted requests, or messages containing sexual or racial innuendos
- Distasteful jokes or ridicule and making someone the butt of jokes
- Asking intimate questions about someone's personal life
- Gossip, speculation or malicious rumours
- Transmission or display of pornographic or sexually suggestive images
- Suggesting sexual favours that may further an employee's career or that refusal may hinder it

Other personal harassment:

- Individuals can also experience harassment based on disability, race or national origin, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, age, gender, being or becoming transgender, or sexual orientation
- Assumptions based on stereotyping
- Asking unwanted intimate questions

Our Behavioural Expectations

What members and lay people should expect from staff:

- Using their knowledge, skills, and expertise to deliver the best possible service
- Listening to views and trying their best to understand and solve problems
- Giving a balanced view of the facts
- Being courteous, respectful, and helpful
- Recognising members' expertise
- To inform the necessary individuals if agreed actions have not been implemented within a reasonable time
- Appropriate use of social media as set out in the RCPsych's social media Policy
- Freedom to say to members when something is not achievable due to resources or time constraints

This section asks members involved in College work to make a number of specific commitments, including observing the Nolan Principles of conduct in public life.

What staff and lay people should expect from members:

- Being courteous, respectful, and supportive
- Being challenged in a constructive way at the right time and place
- Listening and understanding
- Respect for their areas of expertise
- Respect for management authority
- Openness to listen to Staff when something is not achievable due to resources or time constraints
- Understanding of the Working Together Model

An understanding that the relationship between College members and lay people/staff is defined by their roles within the College. This means that interactions are largely restricted to professional duties related to the College's scope. The relationship doesn't extend beyond these confines, and personal or professional dynamics that fall outside the College's scope are not part of this relationship.

What we expect of lay people and other members of multi-disciplinary team involved in the work of the College

This section asks those involved in College work to make a number of specific commitments, including observing the Nolan Principles of conduct in public life; and the

What members and staff should expect from lay people

- Being courteous, respectful, and supportive
- Being challenged in a constructive way at the right time and place
- Listening and understanding
- Respect for their areas of expertise
- Respect for management authority
- Freedom to say to members and staff when something is not achievable due to resource or time constraints
- An understanding that the relationship between lay people and College members/ staff is not the same as between patients/carers and clinicians and members of the clinical team
- Appropriate use of social media as set out in the College's Social Media Policy (August 2013)

Confidentiality

We expect Officers, College members, lay people and College staff (employees and workers), to uphold the highest standards of confidentiality when handling sensitive personal data. This includes, but is not limited to, information related to individuals' identity, health, financial status, employment, or any other data protected under applicable privacy laws.

Using Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the development of computer systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks include learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and decision-making.

We expect Officers, College members, lay people and College staff (employees and workers) to handle College information carefully.

Inputting sensitive College data into external AI tools such as ChatGPT poses significant data protection risks. These AI tools store conversations on external servers outside our control and may use this data to train their AI models. Therefore, although these AI tools may be used for general enquiries, do not share internal College documents or other sensitive information with them.

How to raise a concern

Below is a list of related policies and procedures that should be read in conjunction with this Behaviour Framework and followed dependent on the nature of the concern. Some policies only apply to staff of RCPsych. Each policy contains an explanation as to the parameters of the policy and details the relevant process as applicable.

- Grievance Procedure
- Anti-bullying and Harassment Policy
- Sexual Harassment Policy
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Protected Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Social Media Policy

To raise a concern please contact your College contact/ Chief Executive Officer/ Honorary Officer/Complaints Manager/ HR.

The following policies can be found on the College website:

- Remit and Procedures of the Disciplinary and Complaints Committee
- Complaints Procedure – for College staff
- Complaints Process for Workers
- MRCPsych Code of Conduct for Examination Candidates

All Members will support the College in maintaining the integrity of College exams. Members will take no action that could jeopardise the integrity of the exams. They will support the College in ensuring that trainees comply with the exams code of conduct.

Each policy listed above is subject to regular review, or if there is a significant change in employment law.

Sanctions

Failure to adhere to the behaviours stated in this framework may result in sanctions in line with the College's policies as listed above up to and including dismissal, removal from membership, and removal from office.