

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK POLICY AND PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose

1.1.1. The University acknowledges that, from time to time, personal relationships may form, or may pre-exist, between members of staff, or members of staff and students. Such situations bring with them the potential to attract allegations of bias or conflict of interest.

1.1.2. Personal relationships between staff and students particularly, are open also to allegations of abuse of trust, authority and power.

1.1.3. The purpose of this framework is to ensure fairness and consistency in the management of personal relationships at work and in such circumstances, to protect the wellbeing and interests of students and staff. The framework:

- a)** Articulates clear standards of behaviour with regard to relationships between staff and students.
- b)** Provides guidance where personal relationships between staff members overlap with working relationships.

1.2. Scope

1.2.1. This policy and professional guidance applies to all members of University staff with respect to any personal relationship with staff or students. This includes any activities carried out on behalf of the University, whether on or off University premises. For the purpose of this policy the term 'staff' is used broadly and includes employees, workers, emeritus professors and honorary/ visiting title holders.

1.2.2. Individuals with dual roles (e.g. Graduate Teaching Assistants) may be defined as students or staff depending on the context in which they are operating i.e. studying or working/ tutoring.

1.2.3. The principles outlined herein should be followed on the commencement of any personal relationship as outlined in section 1.3.

1.3. Definition of Personal Relationship

1.3.1. In the context of this framework, a personal relationship is defined as:

- a)** a family relationship;
- b)** a romantic/sexual relationship;

1.3.2. Reference to “personal relationships” in this guidance relates to relationships as defined above. However, personal relationships are not restricted to these examples and anyone who considers that they are in a relationship which presents a potential conflict of interest should declare it. This may include close or private personal friendships which pre-exist or which have developed beyond the normal day to day social interactions between colleagues, or between staff and students.

2. POLICY

2.1. Relationships between members of staff

2.1.1. For the purposes of this guidance references to “staff” are also intended to encompass relationships with external members of University committees.

2.1.2. Often the existence of a personal relationship between staff members will not pose a conflict of interest. However, where personal relationships occur between a line manager or supervisor and a team member, a real or perceived conflict of interest may arise.

2.1.3. Accordingly:

- a)** members of staff should not line-manage, or be line-managed by, anyone with whom they have a personal relationship as defined in this framework;
- b)** members of staff should ensure that they are not involved in any decision-making processes relating to the conduct, employment or performance management of those with whom they have a personal relationship;
- c)** members of staff should ensure that they are not involved in any practices within the University which could be viewed as canvassing for a person with whom they have a personal relationship, e.g. through recruitment or promotion processes.

2.1.4. Listed below are examples of decision-making processes to which these principles may apply. However, the list is not exhaustive, and staff should exercise care in the discharge of any decision making where a conflict of interest may arise.

Example decision making processes:

- a)** recruitment and selection
- b)** SPRE/ PPRE/ PRE discussions
- c)** promotion/probation
- d)** salary recommendations
- e)** handling of complaints against the individual
- f)** handling of complaints by the individual
- g)** workload allocation, where this goes beyond the normal application of transparent agreed formulae
- h)** allocation of resources such as equipment funding, technical support or space, where this goes beyond the normal application of transparent, agreed formulae

- i) disciplinary issues
- j) issuing of references
- k) approval of any financial payment e.g. timesheets, expenses claims, allocation of external funding
- l) other issues such as regradings, requests for flexible/part-time working or contract extensions.

2.1.5. Where personal relationships occur between members of staff, both individuals are responsible for declaring and dealing appropriately with any potential conflict of interest.

2.1.6. The relevant reporting structure must be reviewed if a personal relationship develops between a line manager and a member of their staff. In this case the relationship should be reported to the appropriate senior manager, who should identify another senior colleague who will perform 'line management' functions in respect of the relative or partner, covering the kinds of circumstances set out above. Relevant arrangements should be made as soon as the situation arises. Substantive alternative line management arrangements should be made where possible and appropriate.

2.1.7. Managers and staff who are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship, may seek guidance from the Human Resources department. Enquiries will remain confidential.

2.2. Relationships between staff and students

2.2.1. The University regards relationships between staff and the students (whether undergraduate or postgraduate) for whom they have, or are likely to have, any direct or indirect responsibility (particularly academic responsibility) as an important professional issue. Personal relationships between staff and students, may raise questions of conflict of interest, of trust and confidence in working relationships and of equal treatment in teaching, learning, supervision, selection, assessment, research and pastoral support. The University expects that the boundaries and moral obligations of the professional roles of staff must be fully recognised, respected and maintained in all situations where staff and students meet, be they academic, pastoral, or social.

2.2.2. Listed below are examples of student related processes to which these principles may apply. However the list is not exhaustive, and staff should exercise care in any circumstances where a conflict of interest may arise.

- a) recruitment and selection
- b) teaching
- c) supervision and assessment
- d) pastoral support
- e) student conduct issues (complaints against the individuals or complaints made by the individual)
- f) extenuating circumstances
- g) issuing of references
- h) the awarding of and processing of bursaries and grants

2.3. General principles

- 2.3.1.** Staff members have a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students. Accordingly, they must respect the trust intrinsic to the staff/student relationship and accept the constraints and obligations inherent in that responsibility. Students should be able to trust that staff members will behave professionally towards them at all times.
- 2.3.2.** Staff members must not use their professional position to pursue a [romantic/ sexual] relationship with a student. It is wholly unacceptable for a member of staff to form, or attempt to form, a [romantic/ sexual] relationship based on an implicit or explicit promise of preferential treatment or on an implicit or explicit threat of detrimental treatment.
- 2.3.3.** Staff should not enter into any relationships with students incompatible with the trust involved in the staff/student relationship. Personal relationships between staff and students, may be perceived as being based on an unequal balance of power in the context of the academic/ professional relationship and as such entail serious risks to both individuals, and potentially to the institutional reputation. Such relationships can also disrupt the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues.
- 2.3.4.** The University discourages staff members from engaging in romantic/ sexual relationships with students. Staff members should not put themselves in a position where their behaviour could be construed as overstepping professional boundaries, thereby precipitating allegations (however unjustified) of inappropriate behaviour or conflict of interest.
- 2.3.5.** Where there is a pre-existing personal relationship between a staff member and a student (for example, when a family member or romantic/sexual partner of a staff member becomes a student in the same School/ discipline) that relationship should be declared as a conflict of interest to the line manager, whose responsibility it will be to ensure clear professional separation between the staff member and student where necessary and appropriate. In such cases, the line manager should take steps to ensure that the member of staff is not involved in any relevant decision-making processes.
- 2.3.6.** If a member of staff does become involved in a romantic/ sexual relationship with a student the member of staff must declare this relationship to their line manager immediately. Where this is not appropriate, the member of staff must declare the relationship to the Dean, Director, or to the Chief People Officer. In these circumstances, it is the responsibility of the line manager or Dean or Director to facilitate the reorganisation of professional duties in order to preclude any involvement in student related processes.
- 2.3.7.** Where it becomes apparent that a relevant personal relationship has not been declared, steps will be taken to investigate the situation. This may result in the matter being reviewed formally in accordance with the University's disciplinary procedure. A member of staff who declares a relationship will not be disadvantaged professionally by making such a declaration, but if a staff member repeatedly engages in personal relationships with students, the matter may be reviewed formally in accordance with the disciplinary procedure.

2.4. Declaring a personal relationship at work

2.4.1. It is important that all relevant personal relationships between staff and students and all personal relationships between members of staff, which could present a conflict of interest are reported to the line manager without delay. Staff members should declare in writing to their line manager (or next senior manager, if their line manager is involved in the relationship) any existing or new personal relationships they have with another member of staff or a student. The written declaration shall set out the nature of the relationship and details of the professional responsibilities which they have in relation to the other.

2.4.2. The line manager will treat these matters in confidence, and in consultation with the member(s) of staff, will find ways in which a potential conflict of interest can be avoided. Staff who are uncertain about whether there is likely to be any risk of a conflict of interest, should discuss this with their line manager.

2.4.3. Where a personal relationship has been disclosed, the line manager will need to consider any necessary steps to facilitate the re-organisation of the member of staff's duties to ensure that any risk of a real or perceived conflict of interest is eliminated or minimised. For relationships involving line management responsibilities this will include making changes to the management line or considering alternative roles. In the case of student relationships steps must be taken to ensure that the staff member will have no further professional responsibility in respect of the student.

2.4.4. The receiving manager should make a record of the information reported and also any actions which have been taken to ensure no conflict of interest arises. This should be sent to Human Resources.

2.5. Non-compliance with these guidelines

2.5.1. Staff members are expected to manage their own relationships without these impacting on the workplace and to behave in a manner which is consistent with the principles laid out in this guidance and in any relevant University policy, including the University's Dignity and Respect Framework. If the University believes that the behaviour of an individual has resulted in a detrimental impact on the work/study environment of others, then the University may investigate the matter in accordance with the relevant disciplinary procedure.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 All members of staff are expected to act in accordance with the principles of the Personal Relationships at Work Policy and Professional Guidance.

3.2 Line managers are expected to be open to receiving declarations relating to personal relationships and take appropriate action to address any concerns arising. Line managers are also expected to take all reports of undeclared personal relationships and/ or complaints relating to actual or perceived personal relationships seriously and seek appropriate advice and support.

3.3 The Chief People Officer has strategic oversight of this policy and University Executive Committee (UEC) members are equally responsible for ensuring that the policy and guidance is appropriately implemented in their areas of responsibility. Any questions on this policy and procedure should be directed to a member of the Human Resources Employee Relations team.

4. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- a) Disciplinary and Appeals Procedure (Academic Staff)
- b) Disciplinary and Appeals Procedure (Staff)
- c) Safeguarding Policy
- d) Dignity and Respect Policy and Procedure
- e) Management of Conflicts of Interest Policy

5. REVIEW, APPROVAL & PUBLICATION

5.1. As a general principle, the Policy will be reviewed by the HR Department, in consultation with recognised Trade Unions, after three years or where operational and/or legislative requirements change. Any revisions will be approved in accordance with UEC and Council procedures, where applicable.

6. DOCUMENT CONTROL INFORMATION

Document Name	Personal Relationships at Work Policy
Owner	Chief People Officer, Human Resources
Version Number	1.2
Equality Analysis Form Submission Date	
Approval Date	19 December 2023
Approved By	Chief People Officer (minor edits)
Date of Commencement	January 2015
Date of Last Review	December 2024 <i>Policy is currently under review and pending the outcome of the OfS consultation</i>
Date for Next Review	July 2025
Related University Policy Documents	Disciplinary and Appeals Procedure (Academic Staff) Disciplinary and Appeals Procedure (Staff) Safeguarding Policy Dignity and Respect Policy and Procedure Management of Conflicts of Interest Policy
<i>For Office Use – Keywords for search function</i>	Personal, Relationship