



Professional Boundaries / Personal Relationships Policy

Policy owner:	Human Resources
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Approver (Date):	July 2025
Review due date:	July 2028
Current Version and update history:	Version 2
Document Type:	Policy
Classification:	External

Personal Relationships / Professional Boundaries Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy outlines our approach to personal relationships and professional boundaries at work. We are committed to providing a safe physical and emotional environment where all our staff and students are respected, feel safe and are treated with dignity. Further we are committed to tackling harassment and sexual misconduct in relation to staff and students.

1.2 We recognise that individuals who work together may form close personal relationships. While personal relationships are a normal part of life, it is crucial to maintain a professional environment based on dignity, trust, and respect.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all internal stakeholders and covers: students, council members, all staff (employees, workers, volunteers, interns) and contractors. It is designed to ensure that personal relationships do not compromise professional conduct, confidentiality, or create conflicts of interest. It is intended to ensure that we are compliant with the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 which came into force on 26 October 2024 and the Office for Students' new condition of registration for all institutions on harassment and sexual misconduct (Condition E6) which requires universities to have in place appropriate mechanisms to prevent abuse of power.

3. Conduct at work

3.1 Personal relationships between any individual regardless of position should not influence professional conduct. Employees involved in close personal relationships with other stakeholders must ensure that these relationships do not adversely affect their work, give rise to conflicts of interest, or provide any other workplace disadvantage or advantage. It is expected that where they exist or arise, such relationships will be declared.

4. Confidentiality

4.1 Confidential information must be protected at all times, and any breach of confidentiality will be treated very seriously and dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

5. Declaring relationships

5.1 All staff must declare personal relationships. This includes personal or family relationships with other staff, contractors, suppliers, and students.

6. Relationships between colleagues

6.1 Staff should declare any personal relationships that may give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest, trust, or breach of confidentiality. Where a personal relationship exists or develops between colleagues who are in a line management or supervisory relationship at work, when involved in recruitment, selection, appraisal, promotion, or in any other management activity or process involving the other party, they must adhere to clear and transparent procedures put in place by the university.

6.2 If staff enter into a personal relationship with a colleague working in the same School, Faculty or Service, an individual that they supervise, a manager, or with any individual which may give rise to a conflict of interest, it must be declared to the line manager and/or Senior HR Partner. Any information disclosed will be treated sensitively and where possible in confidence.

6.3 Where one party has access to confidential information or is in a position of authority over the other, or there is a potential conflict of interest situation, we reserve the right to transfer one or both of the individuals involved in a personal relationship to an alternative post either temporarily or permanently. In such circumstances, we will consult with both individuals and seek to reach a satisfactory agreement regarding the transfer.

6.4 Colleagues in a personal relationship should not normally work together in any circumstance whereby a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality, or unfair advantage (or disadvantage) may be perceived to be gained from the overlap of a personal and professional relationship. In any such circumstances, the relationship must be declared in confidence to the line manager (or the line manager's manager). The manager to whom the information is disclosed will then investigate alternative management arrangements and confirm the outcome to the individuals concerned. If it is considered unavoidable to inform other colleagues about the relationship to explain a change in management arrangements, this will be discussed with the individuals concerned before it is disclosed.

6.5 Relationships between colleagues are not limited to romantic/partnership relationships but may also extend to family members, including sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, stepchildren, etc., (the list is not exhaustive)

7. Breakdown of Relationships

7.1 After personal relationships end or fracture, all parties are expected to continue conducting themselves professionally and avoid personal disputes that impact the working environment or other colleagues and students. It may also be appropriate for some of the actions put in place by the organisation during the relationship to continue for a period of time following the end of the relationship. The individuals involved will be consulted and required to comply with reasonable actions. If one of the parties

harasses or bullies the other party, this will be dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure.

8. Recruitment

8.1 Applicants for any role at the University must declare any relationships they may have with existing members of staff, students, or other stakeholders (where known). If a relative or close personal friend already works for a School, Faculty or Service it is unlikely that an appointment will be made to that School, Faculty or Service. An appointment will never be made if a relative or close friend is the line manager or may be the line manager of the individual or holds a senior role with the School, Faculty or Service.

9. Professional Boundaries

9.1 Professional boundaries are parameters that describe the limits of a relationship in circumstances where one person (for example a student, but this could also be a junior or younger member of staff) entrusts their welfare and safety to another person (a member of staff). In these circumstances a power imbalance exists. All staff are in a unique position of trust, care, authority and influence with students and this means there is always an inherent power imbalance between them. It also means that professional boundaries must be established, maintained and respected at all times.

9.2 Staff must maintain professional boundaries with students, avoiding any behaviour that could be misinterpreted as romantic or sexual, whether consensual, non-consensual or condoned by carers. This includes flirtatious behaviour, inappropriate socializing, and intimate contact. Staff interaction with students must be professional at all times, including inside and outside of the university and its hours. Such relationships have a negative impact on the teaching and learning of students and colleagues and may carry a serious reputational risk for the member of staff and the university overall. Invariably they have an impact on equal learning opportunities which must always be given to each student without discrimination or creating advantage or disadvantage for any student.

9.3 The boundaries and expectations above also apply to all forms of social media. Staff should not exchange their personal telephone numbers or emails with students. If it is alleged that any member of staff has not observed the aforementioned boundaries, such allegation(s) will be investigated and considered in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedure.

9.4 All staff are expected to use their own good judgement and think very carefully about the implications and potential consequences of engaging in certain behaviours with students and staff and always err on the side of caution. There may be exceptional occasions where an ongoing intimate personal relationship may have existed before the date the staff member became relevant or responsible in relation to a student or member of staff. In that circumstance, it is expected that the staff member will have

declared the relationship to their line manager or their Senior HR Partner. In such instances a risk assessment will be completed to ensure the relationship is compliant with the expectations of this policy.

9.5 Any sexual, romantic or inappropriate relationship with a student under the age of eighteen is likely to constitute a criminal offence under the 'abuse of trust' provisions of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. In those circumstances the matter will be dealt with in accordance with the University's Disciplinary Procedure.

9.6 Conflict of interest issues must be reported to the Dean, Director, Head of Service or other line manager as soon as possible, for example if a student is a relative or neighbour of a member of staff or a partner or spouse. In those circumstances, we will always endeavour to make appropriate alternative arrangements in relation to the student.

10. Disciplinary Action

10.1 The University deems any sexual, romantic or inappropriate relationship with any student as potential gross misconduct. Where students are employed part-time by the University they are defined for the purposes of this policy, by their principal status at the university and not as a member of staff.

10.2 Failure to maintain professional boundaries or declare personal relationships may result in disciplinary action being taken and, depending on the circumstances, a referral for investigation under safeguarding procedures. If appropriate, action could also include referral to professional registration bodies or other official authorities.

11. Further Guidance

11.1 Staff may seek guidance on the implementation of this policy from the Deputy Director of Human Resources or a Senior HR Partner. Students may seek guidance from their Student Welfare Officer or a member of the Student Complaints Team.

11.2 This guidance depends on the professional integrity of staff, the maturity of students, and the good judgement and common sense of managers. Where professional integrity, good judgement and common sense prevail the issues this Policy is designed to deal with should not arise.

12. Linked Policies and Procedures

Bullying & Harassment, including Sexual Harassment Procedure

Dignity and Respect at Work Policy

Safeguarding Policy

Disciplinary Procedure