

STAFF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS POLICY

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1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF POLICY

The University is committed to maintaining a safe, supportive and inclusive environment in which our students and staff can contribute. Relationships are at the heart of everything that we do and in particular drive our research, teaching and knowledge exchange activities.

We are equally committed to the integrity of our actions, which means making decisions free of bias and conflict of interest. We recognise that some staff personal relationships can give rise to an actual or perceived breach of those principles, which can have a negative impact on the University and the individuals concerned.

This policy sets out our position on personal relationships at work and provides guidance on:

- What is meant by ‘staff personal relationships’;
- What staff should do if they are in a personal relationship that falls within the scope of this policy;
- How concerns about staff personal relationships can be raised;
- The procedure that will normally be followed when a concern is raised; and
- The support and protection that staff are afforded when raising a concern.

2 APPLICATION OF POLICY TO UNIVERSITY STAFF

This policy applies to all University staff (including employees, workers and agency workers). Any reference to “staff” should be construed accordingly.

3 STAFF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

This policy applies to all staff personal relationships including (but not limited to) current and former:

- Family relationships (including relationships by marriage);
- Social / extra-curricular relationships (particularly where one party could be in a position to influence a work or study-related outcome for the other). This refers to relationships that involves close friendships and frequent engagement in activities unrelated to the workplace or study;
- Financial relationships (including where one party is indebted to or dependent upon the other);
- Business relationships;
- Commercial relationships; and
- Sexual / romantic / intimate / emotional relationships. The latter of these is defined as a relationship which is more than platonic with an emotional connection even if there is no physical or sexual interaction.

These relationships may occur between the member of staff and any individual including:

- Students;
- Other members of staff;
- Contractors;
- Other third parties who do business with, or have a commercial or educational interest in, the University’s activities.

The University must ensure that a Staff Personal Relationship does not create a perceived or actual: conflict of interest; breach of academic or professional integrity; breach of trust or confidentiality; undue influence over any matter concerning the University’s business. This could arise in the following (non-exhaustive) circumstances:

- Recruitment, management and retention of staff including delegation of resources, staff development and career progression;
- Interactions with students including teaching, learning, supervision, assessment and marking;
- Deployment of financial and other resources to staff, students and other third parties; and
- Access to confidential information.

Intimate relationships between staff and students under the age of 18 are prohibited and may result in criminal prosecution. Staff Personal Relationships with students over 18 are strongly discouraged. These relationships are more likely than other Staff Personal Relationships to attract concerns about abuse of power, conflict of interest, potential disruption of studies for the student and their peers and unprofessionalism due to the pastoral nature of the relationship.

4 DISCLOSING A STAFF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

A Staff Personal Relationship must be disclosed to the relevant Head of Department / School / Director or (in the case of more senior staff) relevant Executive Dean or Senior Officer at the earliest opportunity, where it could be reasonably considered that it creates, could create or could be perceived to create the concern(s) dealt with under this policy. In exceptional circumstances where the report cannot reasonably be made to the individuals noted above and / or where the disclosure relates to a Senior Officer, a disclosure can be made to the Convener of the University Court.

A failure to timeously disclose a Staff Personal Relationship in these circumstances may result in consideration of disciplinary action. Please note that where a Staff Personal Relationship has been disclosed in the past and no action has been required, the matter should be disclosed again where a change in circumstances mean that the Staff Personal Relationship could now be reasonably considered to create or could be perceived to create the concern(s) dealt with under this policy.

The University will take reasonable steps to treat all disclosures raised in a confidential and sensitive manner, ensuring where possible that it does not impact upon any party's professional advancement or academic progress.

If you are unsure about whether a relationship would be covered by the policy, you can seek advice from the [HR Team](#) in the first instance.

5 RAISING A CONCERN ABOUT A STAFF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Concerns about a Staff Personal Relationship can be raised by members of staff, students and third parties under this policy, where it is reasonably believed that an actual or potential conflict of interest has arisen or could arise. Concerns should be raised to the relevant Head of Department / School; or (in the case of more senior staff) relevant Executive Dean or Senior Officer at the earliest opportunity. In exceptional circumstances where the concern cannot reasonably be made to the individuals noted above and / or where the concern relates to a Senior Officer, a concern can be raised with the Convener of the University Court.

Individuals are encouraged to provide as much information as possible when raising a concern, preferably in writing. Whilst proof of the legitimacy of the concern is not required, as a minimum the individual should provide:

- Details of the nature of the concern;
- Reasons why the individual believes this concern to be accurate; and
- The background / history to the concern.

It is at the University's discretion whether it will reveal what action, if any, will be taken as a result of the concern(s) the individual has raised, bearing in mind the University's obligations in respect of third party confidentiality.

6 PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH A DISCLOSURE OR CONCERN ABOUT A STAFF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

On receipt of a disclosure (under Paragraph 4) or a concern (under Paragraph 5), the following procedure will normally apply and should usually be completed within four weeks of receipt of disclosure.

6.1 Review of information

The recipient/s of the disclosure or concern shall assess the information, seeking support from HR where required.

Following a meeting with the staff member concerned and, where appropriate and/or necessary, the other individual involved in the relationship/alleged relationship, the recipient of the disclosure will determine whether a conflict of interest, breach of academic or professional integrity, breach of trust or confidentiality and/or undue influence over a matter concerning the University's business, has occurred or could occur.

6.2 Outcome

The recipient of the disclosure or concern, following discussion with the member of staff, shall determine the next steps, which may be:

6.2.1 Considered but no action required

The Staff Personal Relationship creates no conflict of interest, breach of academic or professional integrity, breach of trust or confidentiality and/or undue influence on University business. The matter will not be recorded. Should circumstances arise in the future where the member of staff has cause to reasonably consider that the Staff Personal Relationship could now create or could be perceived to create the concern(s) dealt with under this policy, a further disclosure should be made.

6.2.2 Action required to minimise risk

The Staff Personal Relationship currently creates no conflict of interest, breach of academic or professional integrity, breach of trust or confidentiality and/or undue influence on University business however action should be taken to minimise that risk. Action may include:

- Reorganising the member of staff's duties to minimise contact with the other individual at work;
- Removing the member of staff's responsibility in relation to the student's work, including marking and assessment or, where this is not possible, engaging a co-supervisor;
- Ensuring that the member of staff is not the sole decision maker in respect of issues that impact upon that student;
- Removing the member of staff's responsibility in relation to an individual's work, including recruitment, management and retention of staff, delegation of resources, accountability and development review and career progression;
- Ensuring that the member of staff is not the sole decision maker in respect of issues that impact upon that individual; and/or
- In exceptional circumstances, seeking to move one staff member to a different department / reporting line / area of the University.

The following information will be recorded by the recipient of the disclosure and shared with the HR team to place within the member of staff's confidential HR file:

- The fact that the member of staff is in a Staff Personal Relationship falling within the scope of this policy (note: the detail of or other participant(s) in that relationship will be anonymised, in so far as that is possible); and
- Brief details of any action taken to minimise the risk identified (note: the detail of or other participant(s) in that relationship will be anonymised, in so far as that is possible).

The recipient of the disclosure will ensure that relevant members of the department are aware of any action taken to minimise the risk identified, but will not disclose the nature of the personal relationship.

Any member of staff who fails to comply with action required under this policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

6.2.3 Action required as a result of breach of University Policies

Where appropriate, a disclosure or concern raised under this policy may ultimately be considered under another University policy, e.g. where there are concerns that a Staff Personal Relationship breaches the standards expected of the member of staff. Examples of standards breached are provided in Appendix A of the Dignity and Respect Policy.

If that is the case, there may be further investigation / consideration of the matter. This policy is intended to supplement and not replace other University policies that may be utilised in these cases (including the [Fraud Prevention Policy](#), the [Complaints Handling Procedure](#), the [Disciplinary Procedure](#), the [Code of Practice on Conflicts of Interest](#), the [Grievance Procedure](#) and/or the [Dignity and Respect Policy](#))

7 DATA RECORDING AND RETENTION

It is necessary and proportionate to record a relevant disclosure and to retain this information for a reasonable period of time, in this instance for, at a minimum, the duration of the relationship. When the relationship is no longer relevant any local files held by the department will be destroyed. Relevant information relating to the disclosure will continue to be held on the employee's personal HR file which is normally retained for 6 years after employment ends.

8 FALSE DISCLOSURE OF STAFF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Any proven instances of disclosures or concerns being raised with malicious intent or vexatiously will be viewed seriously and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the individual making the false disclosure.

9 COMPLAINTS IN RELATION TO THIS POLICY

If a member of staff is unhappy with the way the University has responded to a disclosure of a staff relationship, they may raise this with their Head of School/Director and/or Human Resource team in the first instance. A complaint from an individual who is not an employee of the University should be raised through the University's [Complaints Handling Procedure](#).

10 POLICY REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed as required. Any feedback on the Policy content should be directed in the first instance to [Human Resources](#), who will consider this as part of the review.