

GUIDELINES ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

This guide is intended to provide information to employees regarding personal relationships within the university to avoid any perceived, actual or potential conflicts of interest or misuse of authority.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The university values and relies upon the professional integrity of its employees, particularly where an employee has supervisory responsibilities or a professional relationship with a student.
- 1.2** So that employees conduct themselves and are perceived to conduct themselves in a professional manner, it is necessary to recognise and take account of personal relationships which might affect working relationships.
- 1.3** The university is committed to promoting equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination. Accordingly, these guidelines will be applied fairly and consistently and with due regard to equality of treatment.
- 1.4** The guidelines do not form part of employees' contracts of employment. They will be kept under review and may be revised from time to time.

2. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 2.1** The guidelines apply to all individuals working at all levels and grades, including full-time, part-time, fixed term employees and casual workers.
- 2.2** In the context of these guidelines:
 - (a) a 'personal relationship' is a personal relationship which is:
 - (i) a family relationship;
 - (ii) a business/commercial/financial relationship; or
 - (iii) a sexual/romantic relationship (this relationship involves one or more of the following elements: physical intimacy including isolated or repeated sexual activity; or romantic or emotional intimacy); and
 - (b) a 'working relationship' is any situation in which individuals will interact in the course of their day-to-day work. This includes situations where one of the individuals in the personal relationship is not an employee of the university. For example, they might be an agency worker, or work for a contractor.
- 2.3** The guidelines apply to personal relationships between:
 - (a) employees of the university;
 - (b) an employee of the university and an agency worker, casual worker, consultant, contractor or supplier, and/or
 - (c) an employee of the university and a current student of the university.
- 2.4** Although most social and personal relationships need not present a difficulty, it is recognised that there will be certain circumstances where employees may need to avoid taking certain decisions or undertaking certain roles in order to protect themselves and the university from any potential allegations

of impropriety, unfair bias, abuse of power or conflict of interest.

2.5 These guidelines are therefore intended to:

- (a) provide guidance in areas where a personal relationship overlaps with any working relationship and particularly where it might cause:
 - (i) a conflict of interest (for example where an employee's personal interests clash with their professional obligations);
 - (ii) breach of confidentiality;
 - (iii) unfair advantage; or
 - (iv) allegations of abuse of power;
- (b) ensure that an employee in a personal relationship is not open to allegations that it has affected a working relationship; and
- (c) enable the situation to be managed, if considered necessary, with a view to avoiding difficulties within any working relationship.

3. DECLARATION

To ensure that the above is achieved all personal relationships as defined in section 2.2 must be declared using the '[Declaration of a Personal Relationship](#)' form which must be returned to the line manager. Information in this form will be treated confidentially and sensitively and be used by the line manager to put in place actions with the intention to mitigate any real or perceived conflicts of interest.

4. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND/OR AGENCY WORKERS, CASUAL/OCCASIONAL WORKERS, CONSULTANTS, CONTRACTORS OR SUPPLIERS

- 4.1** Where an individual is in a line management or supervisory position (including Principal & Co-Investigators on research projects), that person must not be involved in any process involving the other, such as appraisal, promotion, disciplinary, grievance or recruitment (this involves authorising recruitment forms, being involved in determining pay or making offers of employment). In order to achieve this, the decision may be taken to remove line management responsibility and allocate those responsibilities to another nominated line manager who will be responsible for ensuring that they manage the work and all these processes.
- 4.2** Where authorisation is required for any financial matters such as grants, expense claims, salary decisions, appointments, or allocation of external funding for an employee with whom a personal relationship has been declared, additional independent authorisation must be sought from the Head of Department

5. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES/WORKERS AND CURRENT STUDENTS

- 5.1** It is vital that trust and confidence exist between employees and students to ensure that students maximise their learning experience. The professional relationship between a student and an employee of the university is a central part of the student's educational development. A personal relationship could compromise this professional relationship and damage the teaching and learning environment for other students and employees.
- 5.2** All employees are strongly discouraged from entering into a personal relationship with a student. It would be considered unprofessional for an employee to actively seek to initiate a personal relationship without regard to the problems that may ensue.
- 5.3** If a consensual personal relationship does develop between an employee of the university and a

student, the employee must declare the relationship to their line manager without delay by completing the [‘Declaration of a personal relationship at work’](#) form. Any such disclosure will be treated sensitively and is necessary to ensure that any academic and/or professional interaction between the employee and a student with whom the relevant employee has a relationship with, is managed in order to ensure the student’s academic, employment and pastoral interests are not compromised.

- 5.4 The university reserves the right to discontinue the responsibility of the member of staff for teaching, tutoring or supervising a student with whom they have a personal relationship.
- 5.5 In no circumstances will an employee be permitted to take part in the assessment of a student with whom they have a personal relationship.
- 5.6 In the event that the supervision of a post-graduate student involves two employees who are in a personal relationship, a third supervisor should always be assigned.
- 5.7 Any reports from students, staff or third parties regarding a relationship, or suspected relationship between a student and employee will be passed on to HR. HR will review whether there is already a personal relationship disclosure form on record. If no disclosure has been received HR will follow up with the named staff member and their line manager as appropriate. The line manager may also speak with the student. Students will be routinely signposted to the Advice Centre for support.

6. CONFIDENTIAL DECLARATION OF A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP IN A LINE MANAGEMENT OR SUPERVISORY WORKING RELATIONSHIP

- 6.1 Where a personal relationship exists or develops within a line management or supervisory working relationship, the line manager’s manager must be informed via the [‘Declaration of a Personal Relationship form’](#). Upon receiving this information, the line manager should seek further guidance from Human Resources.
- 6.2 Employees may be reluctant to disclose their personal relationship, but it is important that the university is able to assess any risk of conflict of interest, unfair advantage or breach of confidentiality and discuss with employees concerned, ways in which such issues can be avoided.
- 6.3 Information relating to a disclosure of a relationship will be handled with confidence. Employees will be treated with sensitivity during this process.
- 6.4 Upon learning of the personal relationship, the university will consider what, if any, steps need to be taken. Due regard will be given to the potential effect of the relationship on others in the university, any potential negative effect on the workings of a department or team and the professional conduct of the university’s business.
- 6.5 The employee concerned will be consulted with a view to reaching agreement regarding the appropriate action. No action will be taken without first discussing it fully with the employee concerned.
- 6.6 The university may, at its discretion, make alternative management arrangements. This may include transferring some of an employee’s duties or transferring an employee to another department. Any actions to be taken will be confirmed in writing to any employee concerned.
- 6.7 In **no** circumstances will an employee be permitted to appraise another employee with whom they have a personal relationship, nor will they be permitted to recruit, determine salary level, any remuneration or sign off expenses or other administrative documentation.
- 6.8 If it is considered necessary to inform other employees about the personal relationship (for example, in order to explain a change in management arrangements) this will be discussed first with the employee concerned.
- 6.9 If the circumstances of the personal relationship change, the employee must also advise their line manager, who will liaise with Human Resources. The previously agreed actions will be reviewed in consultation with the employee and any further appropriate action taken.

7. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS NOT IN A LINE MANAGEMENT OR SUPERVISORY WORKING RELATIONSHIP

- 7.1** Even where there is no managerial/supervisory relationship with an employee or student in a personal relationship, there may still be a risk of a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage being perceived to be gained from the overlap of a personal and working relationship.
- 7.2** Where there is any possibility of conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage, the relationship should also be declared as above, using the '[Declaration of a personal relationship](#)' form.
- 7.3** An employee should seek the guidance of Human Resources if in any doubt as to whether or not there is or might be a risk of a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage.
- 7.4** Upon learning of the personal relationship, the university will consider what, if any, steps need to be taken, as above.
- 7.5** The line manager/head of department, in consultation with HR, may consider transferring one party or both parties, making alternative line management or supervisory arrangements or implementing other appropriate arrangements to eliminate the conflict of interest, depending on the circumstances. In very rare circumstances, such alternative arrangements may not be feasible, and the university may then have to consider dismissing one or both parties.

8. WORKING IN A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP/PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

- 8.1** To maintain professionalism and avoid embarrassment to others, an employee/worker in a personal relationship should avoid public displays of affection in the workplace. This includes, for example, kissing, touching and holding hands.
- 8.2** When an employee/worker has been in a personal relationship, but it has come to an end, they must conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their role and duties and the university's policies and procedures (including those relating to equality and diversity, RVC Behaviours and dignity at work and study).

9. FAILURE TO DISCLOSE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP IN ACCORDANCE WITH THESE GUIDELINES

- 9.1** In the event that an employee fails to declare a personal relationship where required to do so in accordance with these guidelines, or where it would have been prudent to do so, disciplinary action will be taken. Serious cases will be dealt with as gross misconduct.

In addition to the requirement to complete the '[Declaration of a personal relationship](#)' form, individuals may be required to complete a 'Register of Interest' form, if appropriate.

- 9.2** In relation to section 6, no sanctions or actions will be taken against students who are in a relationship with an employee. It is the employee's responsibility to disclose the relationship so that any conflicts of interest or potential power imbalances can be explored and appropriate measures implemented.

10. HARASSMENT & BULLYING

- 10.1** Employees are reminded that unwanted attention given by either party, whether at work or outside work (for example, when a personal relationship has ended) could constitute bullying and/or harassment. Please refer to 'Dignity at work and Study policy' for further information. In such cases disciplinary action may be taken. Serious cases will be dealt with as gross misconduct.

11. DATA PROTECTION

- 11.1 Any personal data provided to the University as a result of this policy will be treated in accordance with the principles set out in the Data Protection Act 2018.

12. FURTHER GUIDANCE

- 12.1 Employees may seek further guidance, on a confidential basis, from the HR department.

Document Control

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Amendments:	2.1 Included reference to fixed term employees, casual employees and workers in the Scope 2.2 Included the Ofs E6 definition of sexual/romantic relationships 3 Included the requirement to make a declaration using the 'Declaration of a personal relationship' form. 4.1 Specifically referred to authorising staff requests, determining pay and making offers of employment as examples that are prohibited in personal relationships. Also made specific reference to Principal and Co-investigators on research projects. 4.2 Clarified that independent financial authorisation needs to be sought from the Head of Department. Section 4 – removed the paragraph referencing public displays of affection. 5.2 Strengthened the wording around staff relationships with students to say that 'all' staff are strongly discouraged from entering into a Personal relationship with a student not just those staff responsible for teaching and assessment. 5.3 included reference to the necessity of the disclosure so that the information can be used to ensure that the students academic, employment and pastoral interests are not compromised 5.7 Now includes reference to how a third party reporting of a relationship will be dealt with 6.1 Now includes reference to the completion of the declaration form 6.7 Included statement that those in a relationship can not determine salary level or any remuneration. 6.9 There is now a requirement for the line manager to liaise with HR if there is a change in their employees relationship status. 7.1 included reference to student 7.2 now makes reference to using the declaration form 9.1 Makes reference to completing a 'Register of Interest' form in addition to the declaration form for those it is applicable to 9.2 states that no sanctions will be made against a student and that it is the responsibility of the employee to make the disclosure of the relationship.
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