

# PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS POLICY AND PROCEDURE



This document sets out the University's policy and procedure governing personal relationships.

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<b>Consultation Process</b>	Joint Union Consultative Committee
<b>Date of Approval and Committee and/or Executive Officer</b>	Joint Union Consultative Committee

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# 1. POLICY PRINCIPLES

This procedure has been agreed by the Joint Unions Consultative Committee in consultation with the University.

The University recognises that social and personal relationships exist however there may be occasions where a personal relationship may result in an actual or perceived conflict of interest or inappropriate or substantial power relationship.

This policy seeks to ensure the welfare of all staff and students. It aims to preserve the integrity of staff and students protecting them from allegations and/or the consequences of actual or perceived conflicts of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage.

In addition to compliance with this policy, staff and students should ensure that they conduct themselves in a professional manner. They should comply at all times with the University's Equality and Diversity Policy Statement.

# 2. SCOPE OF POLICY

For the purpose of this policy a personal relationship may include:

- A family relationship
- A romantic/sexual relationship (current or former)
- A business/commercial/financial relationship
- A pre-existing or current close personal friendship

These are examples of personal relationships, but personal relationships may exist which fall outside of these parameters. If staff are unsure as to whether a personal relationship should be declared, they should discuss this with their line manager.

Such relationships may exist between staff members or between staff and/or students, job applicants, contractors and suppliers.

It is important to recognise that there is some overlap between staff and student categories (for example staff enrolled on assessed programmes, PhD students who carry out teaching). In these cases, both roles are covered by the policy.

# 3. IDENTIFYING AND DECLARING A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

The University encourages staff to be open about personal relationships referred to in this policy so as to avoid any misunderstandings or unintended breaches of confidentiality or perceived conflict of interest. Staff should declare the relationship by informing the appropriate line manager or Head of Department/Executive Dean. The Manager/Head of Department/Executive Dean will determine ways in which potential conflicts of interests can be avoided. This will be done in consultation with the individual and others if required.

The manager will record the information on the member of staff's CORE record on Aston Portal. This will include the name of the other party and nature of the relationship. The existence of a relationship (not necessarily the nature of the relationship) may be disclosed to relevant parties within the University. Relevant parties may include Programme Directors, Heads of Departments and Line Managers. In the event of a change in a line manager it is the responsibility of the member of staff to declare the relationship to the new line manager.

## 4. PRACTICE

### 4.1 Staff

Action may include but not necessarily be confined to:

- Ensuring the member of staff does not have decision making power in relation to the other person's employment. Examples may include the involvement in decisions relating to recruitment, workload allocation, promotion, career development, remuneration and leave (i.e. annual, study leave).
- Ensuring that the member of staff does not authorise payment such as timesheets, overtime claims, expense claims or allocation of external funding in respect of the person with whom they have declared they have a personal relationship.
- Ensuring that one member of staff does not have line management responsibility of the other.
- Ensuring that one member of staff is not in a position to influence the placing of work contracts or service level agreements which could result in an advantage to the other.
- Particular care will need to be taken where a staff member is in a senior position and they are able to make decisions over groups or staff that might directly or indirectly advantage or disadvantage the person that they are in a relationship with or have a detrimental impact on other colleagues.

The University will explore all appropriate options in order to allow both parties to remain in their roles. However if in the University's opinion, no viable option exists which would allow both parties to continue performing their roles, the University may require one or both the parties to move to another role within the University. If a change of role is not possible, the University may require one or both parties to leave the University's employment. The University considers a timeframe of approximately three months as a reasonable timescale to reach a solution subject to the specific case.

### 4.2 Students

Staff members should ensure that they are mindful of the ethical responsibilities inherent in the staff/student relationship. Intimate relationships between staff and students under the age of 18 are strictly prohibited. Relationships between staff and students over the age of 18 are strongly discouraged where there is a professional connection between the member of staff and the student.

Staff are responsible for ensuring that no personal relationship with a student is or could be perceived to be coercive or an abuse of power. This includes but is not limited to promising rewards for preferential treatment such as additional teaching support or mentoring, or threatening the withdrawal of support if advances are not accepted.

As previously stated staff are encouraged to declare any personal relationship to their line manager. Where no personal relationship has been declared, staff should ensure that wherever possible all communications with students take place via the University's email and telephone systems rather than communicating with students via social media, WhatsApp or text messaging. On occasions, it may be necessary to communicate with students via these alternative methods for exceptional and justified reasons e.g. to alert students to important emails or in relation to compliance with Tier 4 student visa responsibilities.

Where a personal relationship exists with a student:

- The member of staff should not be involved in decisions relating to the student: including but not exclusively: admitting the student, assessing the student's work, or making decisions which impact the student, for example research grants.

- Where a personal relationship exists between a research student and their supervisor the member of staff must declare it to their manager who will make alternative supervision arrangements.
- A personal relationship should be disclosed at the start of any meeting (formal or informal) where the member of staff is present at which the student is being discussed, for example a board of examiners. The nature of the relationship does not need to be disclosed. If they were not aware that the student was being discussed at the beginning, they should disclose the relationship at the first possible opportunity.
- The member of staff should not take any direct individual responsibility for the pastoral care and support of the student.
- Members of staff should not access the records of any student that they have a personal relationship with unless specifically requested to do so by a manager who is aware of their relationship.

### **4.3 If issues arise**

If a member of staff believes has any concerns about a breach of this policy they should refer to their line manager in the first instance. If the line manager is implicated, the member of staff should discuss with a senior manager. Further advice may be sought from Human Resources.

A breach of this policy could include, for example, a failure to properly manage a conflict of interest or a concern that a member of staff has engaged in coercive or behaviour in respect of a student.

Failure to comply with this policy may be dealt with under the University's disciplinary policy. A serious breach of this policy may be treated as gross misconduct.



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