

Staff-Student Relationships Policy

The purpose of this policy is to protect students and staff members and provide clarity of the process. The policy relates to staff who have any responsibility for a student with whom they are having or have had a personal relationship.

Introduction

1. This policy covers current and former close personal or intimate relationships, however brief, between members of staff and students where the staff member has any responsibility for the student. Relationships include, but are not limited to: marital, sexual, romantic, or emotional whether they are conducted in person or online.

For the purposes of this policy, a 'member of staff' should be understood as including but not limited to any individual who is working within the College under a formal contract of employment or as a casual paid worker (including graduate students working as teaching assistants), and any other individual (such as visiting academics) to whom the College offers any of the privileges or facilities normally available to its employees.

A student should be understood as any individual who is studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification, or who is a student on any course arranged by or through the College or any part of the University.

2. The College regards the professional relationship between members of staff and students as central to the student's educational development and wellbeing. Professional relationships are any in which the staff member through his or her employment with the College has any educational, administrative, pastoral or supervisory involvement with a student. The College reminds staff of the importance of maintaining academic and professional integrity and of their responsibility for the welfare of students.

3. Implicit in the professional role of staff members is an obligation to ensure that conflicts of interest do not arise, and that relationships with students for whom the staff member has any responsibility remain strictly professional, respecting the trust inherent in them.

4. While the College does not wish to regulate the private lives of its staff or students, it strongly advises staff not to enter into a close personal or intimate relationship with a student for whom they have any responsibility, irrespective of whether the student did not appear to object, appeared to give consent, gave consent or instigated the behaviour.

5. A close academic relationship between staff who have teaching, professional or pastoral responsibility and student may cause the boundaries between the personal and the professional to become blurred. Some staff may not be conscious that there is a very significant imbalance of power and authority in the relationship. It must be understood by staff in a position of teaching, professional or pastoral responsibility that students are in a position of vulnerability which must not be taken advantage of (whether deliberately or inadvertently). Responsibility lies with the staff member to maintain professional boundaries at all times and avoid giving anyone an impression of treating individual students more or less favourable than their peers.

Examples of appropriate conduct are:-

- To avoid physical contact or unnecessary close proximity
- To refrain from making any personal comments good or bad including about appearance
- To treat all students equally and avoid making gender based generalisations (or commenting on other protected characteristics)

- To avoid social activities with students other than those organised for professional reasons through the College or Departments.
- Extra care should be taken on occasions where alcohol is served.

Guidance for staff on relationships and the need for disclosure

6. The College requires that any close personal or intimate relationship with a student for whom a staff member has any responsibility is brought to the attention of the Senior Tutor in order that action can be taken to mitigate any unintended consequences. The member of staff should also disclose any former relationship with a current student for whom they are given or are to be given responsibility. If the staff member is unsure if they have any responsibility for the student, they should declare the relationship to the Senior Tutor, in order that she can assess the risk of unintended consequences arising. Any declaration of this kind will, so far as possible and subject to the specific provisions of this policy, be treated in confidence, and every effort will be made to ensure that it does not disadvantage either party with regard to their professional advancement or academic progress.

7. Disciplinary action may be taken against a member of staff who fails to declare a close personal or intimate relationship as required by this policy.

8. Attention is drawn to the fact that relationships involving students under the age of eighteen or an adult at risk, could fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 relating to persons in positions of trust having sexual relations with children under eighteen or vulnerable adults. Members of staff must not enter into a close personal or intimate relationship with a student under eighteen years of age or a vulnerable adult for whom they have any responsibility.

9. If a close personal or intimate relationship is pre-existing between a member of staff and a candidate for admission as a student, the member of staff must make the Senior Tutor aware of this at the outset of the admissions exercise, so that steps can be taken to avoid any conflict of interest arising. The matter will, as far as possible, be handled in confidence to ensure that there is no detriment to the candidate.

Senior Tutor's responsibilities

10. If a personal or intimate relationship is disclosed by a member of staff to the Senior Tutor, they should take steps to:

- assess whether any inappropriate conduct has occurred
- consult with the member of staff and the student to identify any impact their relationship may have within the College where appropriate; and,
- ensure that appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential negative effect of the relationship on the parties involved and other staff and/or students.

If the Senior Tutor is personally involved in the situation, the details will be referred to the Principal.

11. The Senior Tutor as far as possible will deal with the situation in a manner that protects the dignity and privacy of all parties, and those involved will be expected to comply with any reasonable decision or action. There can be no obligation on the parties involved to keep their relationship confidential.

12. The Senior Tutor may seek advice on a confidential basis from Human Resources.

Guidance for students on relationships and the need for disclosure

13. The College strongly advises students not to enter into any relationship with a member of College staff with any responsibility for them. A student with any concerns should make contact with the Senior Tutor.

Non-consensual relationships or inappropriate behaviour

14. If any student finds themselves in receipt of unwanted or inappropriate behaviour or involved in a relationship that they do not consider to be truly consensual, or if they consider that they have been adversely affected by a misuse of power, authority, or conflict of interest, they should refer to the [College's policy on harassment](#).

Members of staff who experience unwanted advances and other unwelcome behaviour from students should raise the issue with the Senior Tutor.

Support and guidance

15. Any member of staff or student who has questions about this policy and its application should discuss them with the Senior Tutor in the first instance.

Additional support for staff may be sought from Human Resources or from an appropriate trade union.

Additional support for students may be sought from the [Student Welfare and Support Services](#) or the Dean of Welfare/College Harassment Advisors.