

Personal Relationships in the Workplace

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Description	This policy sets out the University's expectation that staff will carry out their duties with integrity and ensure that conflicts between their personal relationships and University responsibilities are declared and managed.

Related documents

[Code of Conduct](#)
[Conflict of Interest Policy](#)
[Public Interest Disclosure Policy](#)
[Responsible Conduct of Research Policy](#)
[Recruitment and Selection Procedures](#)
[Staffing Delegations: Academic Groups](#)
[Staffing Delegations: Administrative Divisions](#)
[Statement Regarding Integrity of Student Admissions, Scholarships and Prizes Processes and Decision Making at the University](#)

External Links:

[Integrity Act 2009](#)
[Crime and Corruption Act 2001](#)
[Crime and Corruption Commission](#)

[\[Introduction\]](#) [\[Scope\]](#) [\[Application\]](#) [\[Delegated Authorities\]](#)

1. INTRODUCTION

Personal relationships must not interfere with, be seen to interfere with, or influence practices in the workplace. The University expects all staff to avoid and minimise the likelihood of conflicts arising due to personal relationships.

This document is intended to provide guidance for staff on how to deal with personal relationships in the context of the University's Code of Conduct, the Conflict of Interest and Public Interest Disclosure policies, which might involve staff, students, or members of the external community (eg applicants for admission).

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all University staff and people engaged in an unpaid capacity.

3. POLICY

The University requires staff to disclose an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest arising from the existence of a personal relationship as set out in the Conflicts of Interest Policy. The

requirement to disclose the existence of a relationship is based on the potential for, or perception of, a conflict of interest, such that there is the possibility that a decision may be biased or prejudiced, either in favour of or against, a person with whom there is a personal relationship. The policy seeks to assure that no undue advantage or disadvantage occurs because of the existence of a personal relationship. The staff member must immediately cease to be involved in any decision making in respect of the person with whom they have a personal relationship until the Relevant Senior Officer determines how the conflict of interest should be managed.

Personal relationships are defined as relationships which extend beyond professional relations, based on factors irrelevant to the working competencies of staff. Personal relationships include:

- family relationships (siblings, parent/child, husband/wife, de facto spouses, partner, cousins, relations by marriage such as brother- or sister-in-law);
- emotional relationships (including sexual relationships and close friendships);
- financial relationships (commercial relationships where pecuniary interest is present).

The general principle to guide behaviour is that it is unethical and undesirable for a personal relationship to intrude, or be perceived to intrude on or influence working practices and decisions.

Staff members must not use their official position as a member of the University inappropriately or dishonestly. Inappropriate use of a staff member's position includes actions which may result in damage to the University or which result in real, potential, or apparent benefit to a staff member, or any other person or organisation.

The nature of student/staff interactions and the role of supervisors and managers may place a staff member in a position of power over other staff and students. This imbalance of power creates the potential for undue influence of a student or more junior staff member, due to age or other factors such as the capacity to influence outcomes. In particular, the development of a personal or sexual relationship where a power imbalance exists creates the potential for abuse of position, for damage to the less empowered and potentially vulnerable individual, and for conflicts of interests.¹ A staff member must not abuse a position of power.

3.1 Examples of potential personal relationship conflict of interest situations

It is not possible to document all instances where personal relationships in the workplace may have the capacity to lead to inappropriate actions and/or questionable outcomes. The following provides examples of situations where it is inappropriate for such relationships to intrude or have influence and which therefore should be avoided or mitigated:

- recruitment and selection, confirmation of probation and promotion of staff;
- hiring of casuals/sessionals;
- direct supervision of staff;
- performance appraisal and review;
- provision of opportunities and funding for research, conferences, and development/training;
- termination of employment;
- supervision of HDR students;
- selection of students for admission;
- assessment of students or award of medals, scholarships etc;
- procurement of goods and services;
- authorisation of payments;

There may be instances where staff involved in personal relationships are called on to provide advice to a decision-making body (eg to recruitment and selection panel; review performance, recommend promotion or probation). In such instances, the individual must declare their relationship, and conflict of interest. The body seeking the advice is advised to seek contrary evidence if there are strongly presented negative or positive views.

¹ Under the *Integrity Act 2009*, a conflict of interest involves a conflict or possible conflict between a person's personal interests and that person's official duties. More detail, including examples, can be found at [Integrity Commissioner: Conflicts of Interest - Personal interests](#)

3.2 Appropriate Action to Address Personal Relationships in the Workplace

Members of staff who are or become involved in personal relationships are required to disclose the relationship to their Relevant Senior Officer in accordance with the Conflict of Interest policy.

The Relevant Senior Officer will take necessary action as set out in the Conflict of Interest policy as a result of the declared conflict of interest. The Relevant Senior Officer is required to put in place arrangements that protect the integrity of the University's processes and decision-making. If in any doubt, the Relevant Senior Officer is required to seek advice from the Director, Human Resources. Staff actions or inaction in breach of the Code of Conduct may be considered to have engaged in misconduct and as such could result in disciplinary processes being enacted.

Where other staff become aware of a relationship as described herein that may potentially involve a conflict of interest, they should consider whether it would be appropriate for them to make a disclosure under the University's Public Interest Disclosure Policy.

4.0 Delegated Authorities

The Relevant Senior Officer is defined in the [Staffing Delegations: Academic Groups](#) and [Staffing Delegations: Administrative Divisions](#).