



Personal Relationships Policy

Human Resources Department

&

Student Life

Document History

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At the University of Liverpool, we are committed to treating everyone with respect in an environment that is open and transparent, that supports our wellbeing and where we can work to the best of our abilities. Within this context, this policy sets out guidelines on personal relationships in order to make sure that all engaged with University life are confident that relationships will be conducted with integrity. This policy will assist in addressing the potential for the perception of conflicts of interest where staff and students have personal relationships in the professional environment and should be read in conjunction with the Statement of Policy and Procedure on Disclosure of Interest (<https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/legal/policies/>).

2.0 Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to:

- Set out the University's position on personal relationships in the workplace
- Set out the procedure to follow in circumstances where there is a personal relationship within the University so that members of staff are not open to allegations of impropriety, bias, abuse of authority, discrimination, conflict of interest or favouritism. It is important to recognise that personal relationships of any nature could result in the perception of bias. This policy provides a framework for actively mitigating the potential for the perception of conflicts of interest.

3.0 Definitions

- a) Close personal relationships – close personal relationship can include:
- family relationships
 - business relationships
 - close friendships
 - sexual or romantic relationships
- b) Staff – all people employed by the University or who act in a professional capacity at or for the University inclusive of honorary staff, Council members, student staff including but not limited to Residential Advisors, Student Ambassadors, Demonstrators etc.
- c) Students – All students studying on any campus of the University, including:
- i. Students who have accepted an offer of a place at the university and who have arrived on campus to embark on their programme but who have not yet completed formal registration processes
 - ii. Students who have completed their programme of study and who have become graduates.
 - iii. Students studying for a University of Liverpool award who spend any time off campus (such as placement, year abroad/in industry, off-site research)

4.0 Romantic or Sexual Relationships between staff and students

- 4.1 Staff should recognise a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students, to respect the trust involved in the staff/student relationship and to accept the obligations and constraints inherent in that responsibility. To embark on a romantic/sexual relationship with a student involves serious difficulties rooted in unequal power, and hence choice, of the parties concerned, as well as real problems in maintaining the boundaries of professional and personal life. Such relationships can also disrupt the teaching and learning environment for other students and for colleagues.
- 4.2 On this basis, the University strongly discourages any member of staff from having, or pursuing a personal or intimate relationship with a student however it is also recognised that the vast majority of students are aged 18 or over and therefore recognises that there may be occasions where relationships develop that may be romantic or sexual in nature. In these circumstances, there is a duty to ensure that abuses of power do not occur and to guard against this and the perception of abuse of power. Behaviour that is considered to undermine the provision of a high quality educational experience will be investigated under the Disciplinary Policy.
- 4.2 Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 it is an offence for anyone over the age of 18 working with young people to have a sexual relationship with a young person under the age of 18 who is in full time education. The member of staff does not need to be responsible for teaching or managing the young person and this applies even where the relationship is considered consensual. Full detail of the University's approach to safeguarding young people can be found in the University's Policy on Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults.

5.0 Relationships between Staff and Students - process

- 5.1 Where a member of staff and a student do form or have a pre-existing close personal relationship, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform their Head of School/Institute/Director. **Failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action for the member of staff.** Staff and students should carefully consider the potential implications of having such relations and how they could impact on their professional standing and their staff / student relationships.
- 5.2 In the event of either a romantic or sexual encounter or relationship, it is essential that the member of staff be transparent and report this to their line manager as soon as possible, in order that the necessary measures are put in place with regards to the staff / student relationship.
- 5.3 For Academic or research staff, the Dean will have responsibility for ensuring that the member of staff will have no involvement in the student's assessment and will separate the member of staff from all direct, individual responsibility for academic, administrative and/or pastoral responsibilities for the student. (e.g. the staff member cannot be the Academic Adviser for the student). The Dean will normally be expected to meet with the student to ensure they understand the arrangements put in place and the reasons for that and to have an opportunity to confirm that the relationship is consensual.
- For Professional Services or Support Staff, the responsibility sits with the Head of Operations.
- 5.4 If the relationship is between a PGR student and a member of her/his supervisory team, the staff member must inform their Head of School/ Institute/ Director and the School/Institute

Director of PGR. Wherever possible, the supervisor should be removed from the supervisory team. If this is not possible, then supervisory responsibilities should be organised to ensure that the staff member concerned is not the lead supervisor. The member of staff who is in a relationship with the PGR student should not be involved in the student's Annual Progress Monitoring. If appropriate, identifying an additional member of the supervisory team should be considered. Where expertise is not available within the University, an external should be considered.

- 5.5 The Line Manager will also talk to the staff involved about other colleagues who may need to be informed in order to guard against accusations or perception of impropriety in the future.
- 5.6 Where a member of staff and a student do form or have a pre-existing close personal relationship, consideration may also need to be given by the member of staff and their Line Manager to any action required in order to guard against accusations or perceptions of impropriety relating to other parties.

6.0 Relationships between members of staff

- 6.1 Where close personal relationships occur or pre-exist between staff, there is a responsibility on the staff members to inform their Line Manager(s) and to work constructively with the manager to recognise and address potential and or perceived conflicts of interest (wherever reasonably practicable). Action may include, for example, revising line management structures where a relationship develops between a line manager and someone within their team.
- 6.2 Staff should also declare any personal relationships (such as family or business relationships) that may have the potential to unfairly disadvantage or advantage an individual e.g. in a recruitment process to the Key Recruiter or a Project Manager in a procurement process.
- 6.3 Where the staff member is also a student of the University, any relevant elements of the Staff Student process should also be undertaken.

7.0 Relationships between members of staff - process

- 7.1 Where relationships do occur or pre-exist between members of staff, both staff members will be expected to inform their Line Manager.
- 7.2 The Line Manager will consider in consultation with the staff, ways in which the potential for conflict of interest might be removed. Please note that where staff work together in the same team or department and are in a supervisory or line management relationship the option for one individual to move to another work team or location may need to be considered. Written record of any agreed actions will be maintained.
- 7.3 The Line Manager will also talk to the staff involved about other colleagues who may need to be informed in order to guard against accusations or perception of impropriety in the future.

8.0 Professional conduct

8.1 At all times, members of the University community, staff and students, are expected to maintain boundaries between professional and personal life. Relationships may have the potential to cause concern and disruption for other students and colleagues and therefore appropriate conduct is essential.

8.2 It is the responsibility of both parties to behave discreetly, in a professional and respectful manner at all times, in the course of all University business, events and performing professional duties elsewhere, including in the office environment, at conferences, or on social occasions.

Some behaviour could be considered to be overstepping appropriate professional boundaries, and risk triggering complaints of unacceptable behaviour or a conflict of interest (or the perception of) even when such an outcome was not intended. Examples include:

- Overt displays of affection in University settings
- Excessive or flirtatious contact in University settings
- Inappropriate remarks, messages or jokes (either face to face, electronically or via social media)

8.3 If there are concerns that the relationship is non-consensual at any point, from the beginning of the relationship or later on, e.g. that the dynamic in the relationship changes or one party maintains unnecessary and unwelcome contact after a relationship has ended, the individual is encouraged to discuss this with Student Support Services or their Head of Department (please see related policies below).

8.4 If a staff member or student has any concerns, (e.g., has witnessed or experienced the behaviour described in points 8.2 and 8.3), the Report & Support online form can be used as a first port of call, to raise an issue and access support. Report & Support offers an online form for staff and students to report instances of bullying, harassment, discrimination and sexual misconduct. It enables reports to be made anonymously or with contact details.

8.5 Where a student or staff member completes the online form, they will be contacted by a Student Services Wellbeing Advisor (students) or a Conflict Resolution Advisor (staff members), who will be able to provide information on the options available, the support that can be accessed, and on University procedures. Students and staff members should note that the completion of a Report & Support form does not initiate a complaint process (further details of how this can be done are provided in the University's Bullying and Harassment policy).

8.6 Where there is an allegation or report of sexual misconduct, it will be appropriate for a risk assessment to be carried out. It may also be necessary to determine whether there are any risks to other staff and students, especially those in working and/or departmental relationships with the responding staff member. For advice on this, please contact the HR Business Partner for your area.

9.0 Related Policies

- [Policy on Student Conduct and Discipline](#)
- [Disciplinary Procedure \(staff\)](#)
- [Policy on the Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults](#)
- [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#)

- [Statement of Policy and Procedure on Disclosure of Interest](#)
- [PGR Code of Practice Appendix 2 Policy on Research Student Supervision](#)

NB. This policy replaces the previous Conflict of Interest policy in relation to staff/student relationships (2.7.2010)

9.0 Review period

This policy will be reviewed in line with the University's review schedule.