



Consensual Relationships Policy

1. Introduction

The College values and relies upon the professional integrity of relationships between staff members and in the staff/student relationship. In order that College business is conducted and is perceived to be conducted in a professional and proper manner it is necessary to distinguish between, and take account of, consensual/personal relationships which overlap with professional ones. It recognises that there may be occasions when staff members or students¹ are related or become close or romantically involved with another member of staff. They may be faced with situations where personal interest may conflict with their duties and may be uncertain about how to deal with them. This policy seeks to establish acceptable treatment and guide behaviour in such situations.

In the context of this document a **consensual/personal** relationship is defined as:

- A family relationship; or
- A business/commercial/financial relationship; or
- A sexual/romantic relationship.

A **professional** relationship is defined as:

- An assessing, supervising, tutoring, mentoring, teaching role; or
- A pastoral role; or
- An administrative or technical support role.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the correct procedure is followed so that members of staff are not open to allegations of impropriety, bias, and abuse of authority, discrimination, conflict of interest or favouritism.

¹ This applies to any student at any point on any course, including prospective students.

3. Aims

The aim of the policy is to set out some principles to help staff avoid conferring, or being perceived as conferring, unfair advantage or disadvantage on students, staff or other individuals because of personal relationships i.e. friendships of different types where one party may be in a position to secure advantage for the other in areas of employment and/or academic life.

4. Consensual Relationship Policy

4.1 Relationships between Staff and Students

The College is committed to an environment for staff and students where decisions about assessment, selection and access to resources are based on merit.

The College values good professional relationships between staff and students. These relationships are heavily reliant on mutual trust and confidence and can be jeopardised when a member of staff enters into a romantic/sexual liaison with a student.

The professional responsibilities of staff towards students may be academic (including assessment), administrative or advisory. If a member of staff has a romantic/sexual relationship with a student for whom they have, or are scheduled to have, any such responsibility, then the member of staff must inform the Academic Director who will be responsible for ensuring that the member of staff will have no involvement in the student's assessment and, as far as practical, will separate the member of staff from other responsibilities in respect of the student. Failure to do so may leave the member of staff open to charges of bias and may lead to disciplinary action. If the member of staff is the Academic Director, he/she should inform the Principal.

The conduct of staff should be based on the following principles:

- Staff should recognise a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interest of students, to respect the trust involved in the staff/student relationship and to accept the constraints and obligations inherent in that responsibility;
- To embark on a romantic/sexual relationship with a student involves serious difficulties in unequal power, and hence choice, of the parties concerned, as well as real problems in maintaining the boundaries of professional and personal life for other students and colleagues;

- Students who are, or who have been, involved in a romantic/sexual relationship with a member of staff and who do not consider their involvement to be truly consensual will have the right to complain under the Student Complaint policy.
- The establishment of an academic relationship with family members, friends or associates who become students also raises ethical and/or professional issues;
- 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. This is applicable even if the relationship is consensual and the person does not teach the young person but works in the same institution where the young person studies. This is because the member of staff is in a position of trust and the young person may be vulnerable to exploitation.

4.2 Relationships between Members of Staff

Where romantic/sexual relationships occur between staff, it is the responsibility of both individuals to deal appropriately with any potential conflicts of interest. It may be necessary to review the relevant reporting structure if the relationship is between a line manager and a member of their team. Any staff needing advice should approach his/her own Head of Department.

Staff should take care that any financial, familial or personal relationships entered into on a consensual basis do not unfairly advantage or disadvantage any member of staff, or other individuals.

The following should be noted and observed:

- If such relationships occur then the staff affected will be expected to inform their Head of Department as soon as possible to ensure that the potential effects can be considered;
- The Head of Department must treat these matters in confidence at all times and will, in consultation with the staff, find ways in which actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest might be managed;
- If the staff member is working in a supervisory relationship and the actual or perceived conflict of interest cannot be resolved by any other means and it is interfering with the effectiveness of work, then it may be necessary to explore the possibility of moving one party to another area of work;

- If a member of staff has a close personal or familial relationship with a job applicant it would normally be necessary for them to avoid any involvement in the recruitment/selection process e.g. as a member of an interview panel or acting as a referee;
- If a member of staff has a close personal or familial relationship with another member of staff they should have no involvement in decisions in relation to pay, reward and/or promotion;
- External and internal applicants for posts are asked to declare relevant personal relationships on application;
- A member of staff who is, or who has been, involved in a romantic/sexual relationship with another member of staff and who does not consider their involvement to be truly consensual will have the right of complaint under the Staff Complaint Policy.

4.3 Declaration of personal relationships where they overlap with professional roles

Staff members who are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a consensual relationship are invited to seek guidance, in confidence, from their Head of Department.

A case whereby any consensual relationship, as defined in this policy, is not declared will be considered a serious matter and may lead to disciplinary action.

5. Consequence of non-compliance

Staff should be aware that a breach of this policy could lead to action under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

6. Harassment and Bullying

The College will not tolerate harassment and bullying at work or in the study environment as detailed in the Dignity and Respect at Work Policy; and the Harassment and Bullying Policy.

Document control box			
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