



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

Personal Relationships Policy

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Introduction

The University of Salford recognises the importance of promoting and preserving the integrity of professional relationships between colleagues as well as with students and third parties.

We have a fundamental obligation as well as a statutory duty to foster a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all members of our community. This includes taking proactive steps to prevent harassment in all its forms.

Where a personal relationship overlaps with a working relationship, this may give rise to an actual or perceived conflict of interest, compromising the integrity of the parties and undermining our reputation. Such situations can also lead to power imbalances, favouritism, or perceptions of bias, all of which can undermine trust and create environments where harassment may occur or go unaddressed.

This policy seeks to identify appropriate boundaries to prevent inappropriate relationships and outlines acceptable professional behaviours in situations where a personal relationship forms or exists.

Elements of the Personal Relationships Policy may at times overlap with other conflicts of interest, such as an external business arrangement, therefore colleagues are advised to also familiarise themselves with the Register of Interests, Gifts and Hospitality Policy.

For further information on the declaration procedure please refer to the Personal Relationships Disclosure Procedure which can be found on the HUB.

Scope

This policy is applicable to all University colleagues. It applies to all personal relationships, including, but not limited to:

- Family relationships
- Business, commercial or financial relationships
- Sexual and/or romantic relationships (both current and former)
- Friendships, including friends of family members and neighbours
- Property sharing or any instances of cohabitation

The policy also applies to relationships conducted virtually, e.g. via social media or any other electronic means, as well as face to face.

This policy should be applied in a fair and equitable manner in line with our university values.

We take a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender, gender expression or identity, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.



Purpose

This policy supports the welfare of all colleagues and students. It helps colleagues to focus on what is in the best interests of the University and its students whilst enabling everyone to demonstrate appropriate behaviours. It aims to protect the integrity of everyone in the University community from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest. This is particularly significant where there is an imbalance of power.

Such conflicts may arise in relation to the following areas:

- All aspects of teaching and learning
- Access to student services including financial assistance, counselling or any other services
- Management and supervision of colleagues
- Deployment of financial and other resources
- Access to confidential information
- Employment matters including recruitment, development opportunities, placements, complaints and discipline

For the avoidance of doubt, this is not an exhaustive list.

Appendix 1 outlines the roles and responsibilities of colleagues, managers and the University in relation to this policy, whilst appendix 2 provides clear definitions.

Principles

Relationships between colleagues and students

The University recognises the inherent imbalance of power between many colleagues and students. Those who work for the University must not abuse their position in any way. This includes making any form of sexual advance towards students, pressurising students into intimate relationships, or through any form of sexual harassment, coercive, controlling or predatory behaviour.

The University prohibits intimate personal relationships between colleagues and students where:

- the student is under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult (as defined in the University's Safeguarding Policy), as such relationships may be unlawful; or
- the colleague has a direct professional colleague/student relationship with the student, and the relationship is not an excluded relationship (please see the definitions in appendix 2). The University believes that such relationships give rise to an actual or potential conflict of interest and/or abuse of power.

Any colleague who is in an intimate personal colleague/student relationship and who is unclear whether it may be a prohibited relationship, may seek guidance on the matter from their manager and/or HR.

Any breaches of this policy may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the University's disciplinary procedures and may constitute gross misconduct.

The University strongly discourages all other colleague/student personal relationships as it believes that such relationships also have the potential to create risks for those involved. Further information about the risks that can arise from colleague/student relationships can be found in appendix 3 - Socialising with Students.

A student will not be penalised by the University for participating in a relationship with a colleague, whether or not it is prohibited by this policy, unless they have committed a breach of a student related University policy themselves.

Where an intimate personal relationship between a student and colleague ends, any future contact or engagement between the parties must be conducted by the colleague in a professional manner which does not impact adversely on the student (or on other colleagues or students). The University will not tolerate any bullying, harassment, victimisation or other detrimental treatment by a colleague towards a student under any circumstances, including where that treatment arises from the ending of a personal relationship between those individuals.

Inappropriate Student Behaviour

Students are required to adhere to our student code of conduct which outlines that inappropriate behaviour towards a colleague by a student is not acceptable, either within the workplace or within a social setting.

It is essential that any such behaviour is addressed swiftly and proportionately, to help prevent any escalation or misunderstanding of professional boundaries. Therefore, where appropriate, colleagues should address the concerning behaviour informally and at the earliest opportunity. Not all situations are suitable for informal resolution, or, due to the nature of the situation, a colleague may feel uncomfortable addressing the matter directly. Therefore, any colleague who needs assistance in responding to any form of inappropriate behaviour that is initiated by a student, should speak to their line manager and/or their director in the first instance.

It is important to note that inappropriate behaviour includes, for example, unwanted attention from a student in the form of letters, gifts, emails, texts or social media messages.

The Dignity at Work and Study Policy and Procedure also provides further detailed guidance for both colleagues and managers on how breaches of the policy may be treated and addressed.

If anyone is made aware of or has concerns in relation to prohibited relationships, please seek immediate advice from your manager and/or HR.

Relationships between colleagues

Whilst most social and personal relationships between colleagues promote good working and academic relationships, there are occasions where a personal relationship may result in an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Therefore, colleagues who have a relationship, other than a professional working relationship, with another colleague should consider whether or not, in the interests of transparency and openness, they should declare that relationship.

Where a personal relationship exists between colleagues who also have a line management or supervisory relationship, disclosure is mandatory. In such instances alternative line management arrangements will be considered.

Colleagues who experience unwanted advances and other unwelcome behaviour should raise the issue with their appropriate manager in accordance with the Dignity at Work and Study Policy and Procedure.

All colleagues are expected to read and familiarise themselves with the Personal Relationships policy. Failure to declare a personal relationship with another colleague, where there is a conflict of interest, may result in disciplinary action being taken.

Recruitment of colleagues

If a colleague becomes aware of a job applicant with whom they share a personal relationship, the colleague will be required to remove themselves from any involvement in the recruitment and selection process e.g. as a member of the recruitment and selection panel. Failure to remove oneself from any involvement in the recruitment process and to declare the nature of their relationship with the candidate may result in disciplinary action being taken.

Relationships between colleagues and third parties

Where a colleague has any relationship, other than a professional working relationship, outside work (e.g. with a third party connected with work) that may result in their objectivity or integrity being challenged, then the employee must declare the relationship. Such relationships must be declared from the outset. Failure to declare a personal relationship with a third party connected to work where there is the potential for a conflict of interest may result in disciplinary action being taken.

Colleagues who experience unwanted advances and other unwelcome behaviour from third parties should raise the issue with their appropriate manager in accordance with the Dignity at Work and Study Policy and Procedure.

Prohibited Relationships and Behaviours

We recognise the inherent imbalance of power between many colleagues and students. Those who work for the University must not abuse their position in any way. This includes making any form of sexual advance towards students, pressurising students into intimate relationships, or through any form of sexual harassment, coercive, controlling or predatory behaviour.

The Personal Relationships Policy also sets out the University's position on relationships between colleagues and students under the age of eighteen or vulnerable adults. These both fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and are therefore prohibited.

A summary table is provided to aid in determining whether relationship should be disclosed. Colleagues should review this and consider whether a personal relationship should be disclosed and if in doubt they should speak to their line manager or HR in the first instance.

Relationship	Prohibited or discouraged?	Requirement for disclosure?
Colleague/Student under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult	Prohibited	N/A Please seek immediate advice from your Department Head and HR.

Colleague/Student where the colleague has a direct professional colleague/student relationship with the student and the relationship is not an excluded relationship	Prohibited	N/A Please seek immediate advice from your Department Head and HR.
Other Colleague/Student relationships	Strongly discouraged	Yes
Colleague/Colleague	N/A	Yes, where there is a conflict of interest. Otherwise encouraged to disclose.
Colleague/Family members or friends who become students	N/A	Yes
Colleague/Job Applicant (where there is a pre-existing relationship)	N/A	Yes
Colleague/Third party – Business or contractual	N/A	Yes, where there is a conflict of interest. Otherwise encouraged to disclose.

Failure on the part of a colleague (including postgraduate students in pastoral and/or supervisory roles) to make a disclosure, where this is required under the policy, may result in disciplinary action being taken.

If the University is made aware of a personal relationship to which this policy applies, we will consider appropriate action which will serve to protect the integrity and welfare of all involved. This will be dealt with in confidence and as sensitively as possible. To protect the interests of all parties, a record of the disclosure and any action, if taken, will be made. Disclosures received will be considered without prejudice to either party.

Disclosing a Relationship

All declarations must be submitted in Oracle Helpdesk via 'Create Helpdesk Request' function. Information required for the purposes of the declaration includes the nature of the relationship and the names and positions of those involved. For further information on the declaration process, please see the Personal Relationships Disclosure Procedure that accompanies this policy which is available on the HUB.

Details of the declaration will be shared in confidence with the relevant manager to ensure that any actions to mitigate conflicts of interest are put into place. Declarations and all associated information will be held securely in line with GDPR principles.

Breach of this Policy

The following will all be treated as potential disciplinary matters which, if proven, could result in disciplinary action against a colleague, up to and including dismissal:

- conducting a personal relationship that is prohibited under this policy.

- failing to declare a relationship where required by and in accordance with this policy; and/or
- any bullying, harassment, victimisation or other detrimental treatment by a colleague towards a student under any circumstances, including where that treatment arises from the ending of a personal relationship between those individuals.

Any allegations implying a breach of this policy will be handled fairly and impartially. In cases where an allegation is found to be deliberately false, the University will consider appropriate action in response.

For non-employees who are not subject to the University's disciplinary policy, the University may (having regard to the terms of any applicable contract, guidelines or other terms governing their relationship with the University) take whatever action it deems appropriate in the event of a breach by them of the terms of this policy. This may include the termination of the relationship with the University.

Appendix 1: Roles and Responsibilities

Colleagues are responsible for:

- Recognising that they are in a position of trust, and that it is their professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students.
- Reporting any concerns around inappropriate, coercive or predatory behaviour in confidence with their line manager (or other appropriate manager, including HR).
- Reporting immediately
- Disclosing all relevant relationships as per the Personal Relationships Policy and the University procedure detailed in this document.
- Ensuring they are familiar with the University's Personal Relationships, Safeguarding and Dignity at Work and Study policies and have undertaken the 'Dignity at Work' training available via e-learning.
- Refraining from idle discussion, speculation or rumour spreading and ensuring that such matters are reported through the appropriate University channels to protect the dignity and privacy of all individuals involved.

Managers are responsible for:

- Addressing all relevant discussions sensitively and confidentially
- Ensuring that if member of their team discloses a relationship where there is a potential conflict of interest that the University's policy and associated procedures are consistently applied, taking advice as appropriate.
- Acting promptly when allegations of abuse of power and trust, controlling/coercive and predatory behaviour, and sexual harassment are reported by colleagues and students in relation to their working and studying environment.
- Maintain confidential records of all actions or controls imposed, so that this can be referred to in case of future conflict.
- Ensuring that all colleagues for whom they have line management responsibility are familiar with the University's Personal Relationships, Safeguarding and Dignity at Work and Study policies and have undertaken the 'Dignity at Work' and 'Harassment and Sexual Misconduct in the Workplace' training available via e-learning.
- Handle any concerns or incidents of inappropriate behaviour with discretion, ensuring that an associated idle discussion, speculation or rumour spreading are address through the appropriate university channels to protect the dignity and privacy of all individuals involved.

The University is responsible for:

- Ensuring students and colleagues are protected from inappropriate behaviour which may include abuse of power and trust, controlling/coercive and predatory behaviour, and harassment.
- Treating all disclosures in a confidential and sensitive manner.

- Ensuring managers, colleagues and students are made aware of the Personal Relationships Policy and Procedure through the University's Hub, publications and general training, where appropriate.

Appendix 2: Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy and any associated guidance:

- **‘Colleagues’** means all employees of the University as well as prospective employees/non-employees who are taking part in a University recruitment or appointment process. Unless stated, the principles set out in this policy also apply to individuals engaged by, or holding an office or post with, the University who do not have employment status. This may include workers, honorary colleagues, emeritus colleagues, volunteers, agency colleagues, contractors, consultants and University governors (‘non-employees’).
- **‘Students’** means any person pursuing a course, module or programme of study or research offered by the University. It includes students who have accepted an offer of a place on a programme of study or research. Where a student also undertakes work for the University, that individual will be treated as both a colleague and a student for the purposes of this policy, commensurate with their respective roles.
- **‘Intimate personal relationship’** between a student and colleague means any relationship that involves one or more of the following elements: 1) physical intimacy including isolated or repeated sexual activity; or 2) romantic or emotional intimacy.
- **‘Direct professional colleague/student relationship’** means a relationship between a ‘relevant colleague’ (defined below) and a student where the colleague has direct academic responsibilities or other direct professional responsibilities, for a student.
- **‘Academic responsibilities’** includes, but is not limited to, teaching, supervision and assessment. **‘Other direct professional responsibilities’** includes colleagues with a direct professional or pastoral responsibility for a student, including but not limited to mental health advisers, colleagues operating student complaint processes and security colleagues.
- **“Conflict of Interest”** arises when an individual has an interest, either financial or non-financial, which may compromise their obligations to the University. Conflict may also arise from a personal connection. That is, anyone with whom the individual has a relationship with which may influence the individual’s objectivity. This includes, but is not limited to, partners or close family members (e.g., parents, siblings, children). Please refer to the Register of Interests, Gifts and Hospitality Policy for further clarification.
- **A direct professional colleague/student relationship** can be an ongoing relationship or a temporary relationship that arises from time to time, for example, through a short-term teaching assignment or research project, a student event or field trip, or in connection with the provision of student services such as finance, immigration, accommodation or wellbeing support.
- **‘Relevant colleague’** means a colleague who has a direct professional colleague/student relationship (as defined above) with a student. It may include, for example: teaching colleague, such as lecturers or graduate teaching assistants; dissertation or project supervisors for taught postgraduate students or research students; personal tutors and

pastoral support colleague; senior colleagues with responsibility or oversight of wider institutional strategy, processes and delivery.

It may also include a student who is also a colleague, where they have direct academic responsibility or other direct professional responsibility for another student (for example, a research student who is tutoring or teaching undergraduate students or acting in a supervisory capacity). The definition will not normally include cleaning or catering colleagues unless they have direct professional responsibilities for a student.

- **'Excluded relationships'** means any ongoing intimate personal relationship between a colleague and a student that: 1) existed before the date this policy came into force and that remains in existence; or, 2) existed before the date that the colleague entered into a direct professional colleague/student relationship with the student.
- **'Abuse of power'** means a situation where a relevant colleague exploits a position of power in relation to a student so as to apply pressure in a way which: 1) may result in the student doing something, or refraining from doing something, that they may not have otherwise done; and, 2) that action or inaction could reasonably result in something that falls within the scope of an intimate personal relationship.

References to 'harassment', 'sexual misconduct', 'bullying' and 'victimisation' are as defined in the Dignity at Work and Study Policy available on the HUB

Appendix 3: Socialising with Students

As a general principle, we would discourage socialising between colleagues and students, in order to maintain healthy professional boundaries. However, we recognise in some limited situations that there may be a requirement for a colleague(s) to spend some social time with students such as during a field trip or an exhibition/event.

Colleagues need to be aware that when socialising with students, even outside of the usual workplace, they are representing the University and must always maintain professional standards and boundaries. This applies to all forms of socialising including face to face or via electronic means.

In social situations, particularly where alcohol is consumed, colleagues must be especially mindful of maintaining professional boundaries with students. Activities such as stepping outside for a cigarette, sharing a taxi ride, or engaging in one-on-one conversations in informal settings can blur the lines between professional and personal relationships. In these contexts, it is important for colleagues to be aware of how their behaviour might be perceived and to take steps to uphold appropriate boundaries.

Equally during University organised or related field trips and events, colleagues must remain aware of the professional context in which these activities occur, even when the setting feels informal or social. These environments can create opportunities for relaxed interaction, but they also carry the risk of blurred boundaries. Shared travel arrangements, or casual conversations over meals can lead to situations that may be misinterpreted or compromise the perception of impartiality. It is therefore essential that colleagues model appropriate behaviour, maintain clear professional boundaries, and avoid any conduct that could be perceived as favouritism or create discomfort.

Where appropriate colleagues should clearly communicate these boundaries to students from the outset, ensuring that interactions remain respectful and aligned with the university's commitment to a safe and inclusive environment.

Prior to any social event where alcohol maybe consumed, colleagues should also review and take any necessary steps to ensure compliance with the University's Alcohol Drug and Substance Misuse Policy which available on the HUB.

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