

## Personal Relationships – Guidelines

### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The University of Leicester values, and wishes to maintain, the professional integrity of relationships between staff members, and between staff and students, whilst working within a friendly, supportive environment.
- 1.2 In order to carry out university teaching and business in a professional manner, it is necessary to distinguish when personal relationships overlap with professional ones. There may be occasions when staff members or students are related, or become close or romantically involved with another member of staff. In such cases, staff may find a conflict in their duties and personal interests. These guidelines offer guidance for when staff are uncertain how to deal with such situations.

### 2 PURPOSE AND AIM

- 2.1 The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that students' wellbeing is protected, and members of staff are not open to allegations of bias, abuse of authority, discrimination, impropriety, conflict of interest or favouritism.
- 2.2 The aim of the guidelines is to set out principles to help staff avoid giving, or being perceived as giving, unfair advantage or disadvantage to students, staff or business colleagues, because of personal relationships, where one party may be in a position to secure advantage for the other in employment and/or academic life.
- 2.3 All staff should adhere to the *Seven Principles of Public Life*, drawn up by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Appendix A).
- 2.4 For the purpose of these guidelines, a personal relationship is defined as, but not limited to a:
- family relationship;
  - romantic/sexual relationship.
- 2.5 It is necessary to have guidelines where consensual romantic and sexual relationships are between people in inherently unequal positions.

Positions which are inherently unequal include:



- Teacher and student;
- Teaching assistant and student;
- Mentor and mentee;
- Principal investigator and post-doctoral student/research assistant;
- Supervisor/line manager and member of staff, where there could be deemed to be a conflict of interest e.g. a Business Partner being involved in a relationship within the College/Division that they support.

### **3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **3.1 Relationships between staff and students**

3.1.1 Whilst the University does not wish to dictate the private lives of its staff, it strongly advises staff against entering into a close, personal or intimate relationship with a student for whom they have any responsibility, or where they have an opportunity to influence a student's progress e.g. as a member of an exam board.

3.1.2 The University is committed to decisions about assessment and selection being based on merit for staff, undergraduate and post-graduate students. The University values and relies on positive, professional relationships between staff and students. These relationships rely on mutual trust and confidence, and can be put at risk when a member of staff enters into a romantic/sexual relationship with a student. In extreme cases, these relationships may jeopardise professional relationships and can result in an abuse of power. Problems may also occur if a consensual relationship later becomes non-consensual and/or a case of harassment.

3.1.3 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 to whom they have, or are scheduled to have, any such responsibility, the member of staff should inform their Head of College/Head of Division, who will be responsible for ensuring that the member of staff will have no involvement in the student's assessment and, in so far as is 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.

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

Staff should recognise a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests and well-being of students, to respect the trust involved in the staff/student relationship, and to accept the constraints and obligations that come with that responsibility.



To start a romantic/sexual relationship with a student involves potential difficulties because of the imbalance of power, as well as problems maintaining the boundaries of professional and personal life. Such relationships can also disrupt the teaching and learning environment 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 consensual, may bring it to the attention of Student Support Services, Student Welfare, Student Counselling or their Head of Department.

3.1.5 The establishment of an academic relationship with family members, or with friends, or associates who become students, also raises potential ethical and/or professional issues.

3.1.6 Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it is an offence for anyone over the age of 18 working with young people (for example teachers, student mentors, academic staff, etc) 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 is studying. This is because the member of staff is in a position of trust, and the young person may be vulnerable to exploitation and, where deemed appropriate, the matter may be referred to the Police.

### **3.2 Relationships between members of staff**

3.2.1 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 member of staff needing advice should approach his/her own Head of College/Division, or the HR Business Partner for their College/Division.

3.2.2 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, nor any other individual, e.g. job applicants or service providers.

3.2.3 Should such relationships happen, the staff affected will be expected to inform their Head of College/Head of Division as soon as possible to ensure that potential effects can be considered.



The Head of College/Head of Division must treat these matters sensitively at all times and will, in consultation with the staff, find ways in which actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest might be avoided.

3.2.4 If staff are working in the same College/Division, or are in a supervisory relationship and the real or perceived conflict of interest cannot be resolved in any other way, and it is impacting on the effectiveness of work, it may be necessary to explore the possibility of moving one member of staff to another area of work or location.

3.2.5 Senate Regulation 9.90 states that supervisors should not be appointed to, or be allowed to remain appointed to, a supervisory team where:

They will be supervising a research student with whom they have, or have had, a close personal or professional relationship;

or;

they have, or have had, a close personal or contractual relationship with another member of the same supervisory team.

Members of the supervisory team must declare any such relationship(s) to the Head of Department or their nominee.

3.2.6 If a member of staff has a close personal or family relationship with a job applicant, it would normally be necessary for him/her to avoid any involvement in the recruitment/selection process, e.g. as a member of an interview panel, or acting as a referee.

External and internal applicants for posts are asked to declare relevant personal relationships on appointment.

3.2.7 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 consensual, will have the right to have their complaint heard through the University Ordinances where appropriate.

#### **4 DECLARATION OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WHERE THEY OVERLAP WITH PROFESSIONAL ROLES**

4.1 Members of staff who are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship are invited to seek guidance, in confidence, from the Director of



Human Resources, a senior member of the Division of Human Resources, or their trade union representative.

- 4.2 A member of staff should not be the sole approver or signatory for any documentation for another member of staff or student, where a personal relationship exists between them (as defined elsewhere in this guidance).
- 4.3 A case where any consensual relationship, as defined in these guidelines, is not declared, and results in an unfair advantage or disadvantage to either party, will be considered a serious matter, and may lead to a disciplinary investigation.

## **5 CONSEQUENCES OF NOT FOLLOWING THE GUIDELINES**

- 5.1 Staff should be aware that a breach of these guidelines could lead to action under the University's Discipline Ordinance.

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**APPENDIX A: THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE****SELFLESSNESS:**

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

**INTEGRITY:**

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

**OBJECTIVITY:**

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:**

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public, and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

**OPENNESS:**

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions, and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

**HONESTY:**

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties, and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

**LEADERSHIP:**

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

[Extracted from the *First Report of the Committee on Standards of Public Life*, May 1995].