

## Staff Student Close Relationship Policy

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1	Creation of Policy	January 2023
1.1	Policy updated into standard template. Links to the Declaration of Close Personal Relationship Form updated.	September 2023

# Staff Student Personal Relationship

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University is committed to providing a safe and supportive working and learning environment and this policy contributes to that being maintained.
- 1.2 A close personal relationship between a member of staff and a student can give rise to a power imbalance. This is where one individual can exert more control over another because of their status or standing. Such power imbalances can significantly impact on the trust and confidence that is fundamental for maintaining a positive and professional relationship between a member of staff and their students. It also impacts negatively on the student experience.

## 2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to minimise the risk of any actual or potential conflicts of interest or imbalances of power between staff and students.
- 2.2 This policy ensures that all staff are aware of the requirement to be transparent, maintain integrity and respect professional boundaries.
- 2.3 It provides a procedure for staff to declare all close personal relationships with students. It requires management to take appropriate steps to protect the student, staff member and University from any possible, actual, or perceived conflict of interest and unfair bias.
- 2.4 The policy applies to all staff regardless of grade and role in the University.
- 2.5 This policy applies to close personal relationships with all students regardless of what stage they are at in their studies, i.e., this includes Postgraduate and Research Students.

## 3. Relationships Between Staff and Students

- 3.1 Staff are required to demonstrate professional integrity in their role and not place themselves in a position of actual or perceived conflict.
- 3.2 Staff are strongly discouraged from knowingly initiating **close personal relationships** (as defined by this policy) with any students and should not be using their position to develop such relationships where they have **professional responsibility** (as defined by this policy) for the student.
- 3.3 It is recognised that in many instances, close personal relationships will pre-date joining the University and / or will not create a power imbalance or conflict of interest however the relationship must still be declared by the employee at the earliest opportunity so an independent judgement can be made.

#### 4. Definitions

- 4.1 A 'member of staff' or 'employee' refers to any individual either employed or engaged by the University to carry out work for the University.
- 4.2 A close personal relationship is defined for the purposes of this policy as:
  - 4.2.1 Family relationship or friendship which involves an emotional attachment beyond the normal work/study acquaintance
  - 4.2.2 Romantic, intimate, and/or sexual relationship
  - 4.2.3 A business/commercial/financial relationship
  - 4.2.4 A close personal relationship is not restricted to these examples and anyone who considers that there could be a potential conflict of interest should declare it as outlined below.
- 4.3 Having professional responsibility for a student could mean:
  - 4.3.1 Pastoral Care

- 4.3.2 Administration i.e., access to personal details
- 4.3.3 Mentoring, Coaching or Training
- 4.3.4 Teaching or Tutoring
- 4.3.5 Supervising
- 4.3.6 Demonstrating the use or setting up of equipment
- 4.3.7 All roles that require supervision of students or can influence decisions relating to a student would be considered as a 'professional responsibility' in this context.

## **5. Staff Expectations**

- 5.1 The safeguarding of students and maintaining professional integrity should always be at the forefront of staff minds when interacting with students. The following outlines what is expected of staff in this context to ensure appropriate professional relationships with students are maintained:
  - 5.1.1 should be familiar with and always adhere to the [Dignity at RGU Policy](#).
  - 5.1.2 Staff are in a position of trust and must ensure that all students are treated fairly and equally.
  - 5.1.3 Staff should seek to avoid forming close personal relationships with students. They should refrain from contacting or meeting students outside of reasonable working hours and must ensure any meetings/discussions with students take place on campus or in another University-approved location.
  - 5.1.4 Staff must not misuse their position of trust and power and should not make any sexual advances towards students or engage in any behaviour that would make the student feel uncomfortable. This would include but is not limited to sexual

harassment; coercive behaviour; or pressuring students into a close personal relationship. See [Dignity at RGU Policy](#).

- 5.1.5 Staff should ensure that all written communication with individual students is done via official University channels i.e., Microsoft Outlook and Teams. Setting up a private WhatsApp group or discussion for example is deemed inappropriate, unless for University approved purposes i.e., Student Pregnancy Support Plan.
- 5.1.6 Managers are expected to ensure that all their staff are aware of expectations in relation to this policy and that any declared close personal relationships are kept under review. Managers are required to take any concerns that are raised by students seriously, take immediate action and consult with their HR Adviser/Business Partner for advice.
- 5.1.7 If staff become aware of a close personal relationship between another member of staff and a student, then they must report this to their Dean/Head of Department and/or HR Business Partner/Adviser.

## **6. Close Personal Relationship Review**

- 6.1 Where a close personal relationship is declared there must be a review of potential conflicts identified. In the event of an actual or perceived conflict of interest/power imbalance then steps must be taken to mitigate the risk.
- 6.2 This may include removal of professional responsibilities for the student or an adjustment to staff duties to ensure there is no direct or sole responsibility for the student.
- 6.3 In many instances there will be little or no power imbalance therefore the close personal relationship would not lead to any action being taken.

- 6.4 Staff who are uncertain about whether they should declare a close personal relationship should always err on the side of caution and seek confidential guidance from their HR Business Partner/HR Adviser or a Fair Treatment Adviser.
- 6.5 Declarations of a close personal relationship where there is little, or no power imbalance will only be shared between line management and Dean/Head of Department. Where there is a declaration made where there are actual conflict of interest/power imbalance management will share this with the relevant HR Business Partner.

## 7. Disclosing a Close Personal Relationship

- 7.1 Staff are responsible for declaring close personal relationships upon appointment to their role and must continue to do so - as and when required - throughout their employment. It is not uncommon, for example, for an employee's partner to return to study and a simple declaration of the relationship will be all that is required on most occasions.
- 7.2 **Staff are not required to disclose the nature of the relationship**, and any information provided that is regarded as special category personal data under Data Protection will not be held, this includes any information related to a person's sex life or sexual orientation. The University's Information Governance Policy offers definitions of special category data and further advice can be sought from [dp@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:dp@rgu.ac.uk). However, to ensure students are safeguarded and the professional relationship is maintained, a close personal relationship disclosure must be made.
- 7.2.1 Managers should consult the [Staff Student Close Personal Relationship Policy Guidance](#) document for further guidance.
- 7.3 The procedure for the declaring a close personal relationship with a student is as follows:
- 7.3.1 Employee arranges to meet with relevant Line Manager to disclose that there is a close personal relationship with a student.

- 7.3.1.1 Relevant line manager is expected to be at Grade 7 or above.
- 7.3.2 Employee and line manager meet to discuss the close personal relationship and potential impact this may have on the professional relationship and/or actual or perceived conflict of interest/power imbalance.
  - 7.3.2.1 Staff are not required to disclose the nature of the close personal relationship as this may result in the disclosure of Special Category Data specifically about a person's sex life and/or a personal sexual orientation. If during the process this information is disclosed this must not be recorded. Further guidance is available in the Staff Student Close Personal Relationship Policy Guidance document.
- 7.3.3 Agreement is reached between employee and management regarding any steps/adjustments to be taken to mitigate any risk.
- 7.3.4 Employee and manager complete [Close Personal Relationship form](#) during meeting if there are any steps/adjustment to be made.
  - 7.3.4.1 If no action to be taken, no declaration form is required but it should be recorded at a school/department level that there are no conflicts identified. The situation should remain under regular review by the Line Manager. Further guidance is available in the Staff Student Close Personal Relationship Policy Guidance document.
- 7.3.5 Line manager to liaise with Dean/Head of Department regarding any apparent conflict of interest and the steps/adjustments required.
- 7.3.6 Declaration of Interest Form signed off by Dean/Head of Department. Follow up discussion arranged if required and form updated.
- 7.3.7 Form shared with HR Business Partner if there is an apparent Conflict of Interest.

7.3.8 Line Manager maintain a dialogue with the staff member to ensure the close personal relationship is kept under review and any change in circumstances is considered.

7.3.9 Line Manager should ensure good records management, further guidance can be found in the Staff Student Close Personal Relationship Policy Guidance.

## **8. Student Notification**

8.1 If a staff member makes a disclosure of a close personal relationship, the student will be notified of this by the relevant line manager. The purpose of notifying the student is to ensure they are aware of the Student Staff Relationship Policy and Guidance.

8.2 The student will be notified that a disclosure has been made and will be provided with an outline of any adjustments put in place to mitigate any risk. The notification will also make the student aware of the support and advice available should there be a situation of misconduct.

8.3 Students may also wish to notify a staff member should they become aware of a close personal relationship between a member of staff and a student. This should be reported to an appropriate member of staff, such as their Course Leader, who should notify the appropriate line manager.

8.4 Further guidance on student notification can be found in [Staff Student Close Personal Relationship Policy Guidance](#).

## **9. Failure to Follow Policy**

9.1 The University expects every staff member to behave and conduct themselves in line with the close personal relationship policy and meet the expectations outlined in section 3.2.

9.2 Failure to comply with this policy, or any arrangements which are put in place under it, and/or any behaviour that is considered inappropriate (i.e., evidence of unfair bias/personal conflicts brought into the workplace) may be treated as a disciplinary matter.

## 10. Support and Advice

- 10.1 If staff or students need additional support in relation to this policy, they can seek support from the following resources:
- 10.1.1 The [Dignity @ RGU policy](#) can be referred to as an additional resource as it outlines the procedures for staff and students to follow if they experience or witness any unacceptable behaviour.
  - 10.1.2 Staff may speak to a [Fair Treatment Adviser](#) who is a member of HR staff who can provide impartial guidance to staff to understand what informal and formal options are available, while also signposting to support resources. Meetings are strictly confidential.
  - 10.1.3 Students are reminded that they can speak to: Personal Tutors, Academic Staff, Student Counsellors, Student Reps, Student Life Staff or Student Union Staff who will take any complaints or concerns raised seriously.
  - 10.1.4 RGU's [report and support](#) platform allows for disclosures to be made and for individuals to receive support from internal or external services. Disclosures can be made by both staff and students in relation to Gender Based Violence (GBV), hate crime, harassment, or bullying.
  - 10.1.5 RGU has a number of staff trained as [First Responders](#) who can be contacted to support an individual confidentially and in a supportive manner regarding GBV.
  - 10.1.6 Staff have the option of contacting the [Employee Assistance Helpline](#) which is a free confidential telephone counselling and advisory service which can be contacted by calling 0800 169 1920 or through the LifeWorks app.

## 11. Review

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years or as required.