

Staff - Student Relationships Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy outlines the University's position on relationships between members of staff and students. The relationship between students and staff are central to the student experience and this policy is intended to ensure that these relationships are professional, have boundaries, and are founded on mutual trust and confidence.

1.2 In the context of this document, a **personal** relationship is defined as:

- a family relationship;
- a business/commercial/financial relationship; or
- a sexual/romantic relationship, however brief.

1.3 A **professional** relationship is defined as:

- a teaching, assessing, supervising, tutoring, mentoring role; or
- a pastoral or welfare role; or
- an administrative or technical support role.

1.4 The difference in power between a member of staff and a student makes any personal relationships potentially vulnerable to exploitation. They also generate real or perceived inequalities, not only involving the persons concerned, but also affecting other members of the University, whether students or staff.

2. Scope of the policy

2.1 This policy applies to all staff members of the University, including hourly paid lecturers and other contracted staff employed directly by the University.

2.2 The policy also applies to staff who are enrolled as students.

3. Policy statement

3.1 The staff-student relationship should be one of trust and confidence in order that students can benefit from the learning experience offered by the University. It is also vital that students benefit from equality of treatment and so it is important that a personal

relationship between a member of staff and a student does not in any way prejudice that equality, in reality or perception.

3.2 Members of UWL staff are strongly discouraged from entering into a personal relationship with any student and this policy covers all students regardless of their course. Although undergraduate students and postgraduate research students (given the nature of the supervisor/student relationship) are seen to be more vulnerable, all students are affected by the imbalance of power in any such relationship. In particular, under the Sexual Offences Act 2000 it is an offence for a person over 18 to have a sexual relationship with a child under 18 where that person is in a position of trust in respect of that child, even if the relationship is consensual.

3.3 The University regards it as unprofessional for any staff member to actively seek to initiate a personal relationship or to pursue such a relationship with a student in any circumstance. It has a duty of care to its students to ensure that they can study in a safe environment and that their welfare is protected. The University may, therefore, take disciplinary action under the Staff Disciplinary Procedure where there is any behaviour by members of staff that undermines the professional staff student relationship such as texting, inappropriate communications, asking them to socialise etc. Such behaviour or that of a more serious nature such as asking for sexual favours or other forms of abuse, will lead to action.

3.4 UWL does, however, recognise that such relationships may nonetheless develop where it may not have been initiated by the staff member or may pre-exist. Where a member of staff has a professional role in relation to a student with whom they have a personal relationship, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform their Head of School/Service promptly. The Academic Dean of the concerned Department will review teaching, tutoring, assessment, administrative or any other arrangements to ensure the interests of the student is protected.

4. Guidance on maintaining professional relationships

4.1 Staff should aim to develop good professional relationships with students. Within this, certain boundaries are important to maintain to ensure that these relationships remain professional as follows:

- Although staff should aim to develop a professional relationship they should not see themselves as friends;
- Staff should maintain an appropriate boundary between work and home including not sharing personal information with them or socialising with them except on any appropriate course related functions;
- Staff should only communicate with students through official University channels such as UWL email or blackboard. They should not give out personal phone numbers

or email addresses. They should also not use social media platforms for communication such as WhatsApp or request students to be a 'friend' on Facebook or respond to such requests from students – staff should refer to the guidance on the use of social media for further information about what is acceptable.

5. Declarations

5.1 Staff must declare to their Academic Dean where they have an existing personal relationship with a student. Where this exists, the Academic Dean should ensure that the members of staff does not teach or assess the student or otherwise have any professional responsibility for them. Such relationships should also be declared and it is important that the student is not advantaged by the relationship above their peers.

5.2 Where a personal relationship develops, it is the member of staff must inform the Head of School/Service promptly. Where a staff member has not declared it will be viewed as a disciplinary matter.

5.3 Academic Deans who become aware of a relationship that has not been declared should initiate appropriate action in conjunction with HR.

6. Reporting concerns

6.1 Students who are concerned about a relationship with a member of staff will be encouraged to use the guidance on dealing with unacceptable behaviour where applicable (see 7 below).

6.2 Staff who have concerns about the relationships of other member of staff should inform their head of school/service or HR.

7. Dealing with unacceptable behaviour

7.1 The University is committed to providing and supporting an environment that promotes equality and diversity. It values the diverse community and aims to create an environment of respect where all are treated equally and where staff and students can reach their full potential.

7.2 Harassment, bullying and discrimination can lead to fear, stress and anxiety and may be unlawful. The University finds any form of such behaviour unacceptable. If a student is unsure whether a relationship with a member of staff could be defined as harassment or bullying, they should be encouraged to act promptly and seek advice from the Head of Student Services or the Students' Union advice team.