



PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN UNIVERSITY STAFF AND STUDENTS

Director of Human Resources

Policy Reference: Personal Relationships Between University Staff and Students V1

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Norwich University of the Arts
Personal Relationships Between University Staff and Students
Policy and Guidance

This Policy and Guidance will apply from 1st August 2025 on an interim basis whilst consultation is underway. It is anticipated that the final policy and guidance will be available in November 2025.

1. Purpose

This policy sets out the expectations and obligations of the University's staff with respect to their personal relationships with students in order to limit circumstances where a position of power may be abused. It aims to ensure that students and staff are able to work and study in a safe, positive, and supportive working environment where everyone is treated fairly and professional boundaries are clear. It seeks to protect students from harm that may arise from entering into a relationship with a member of staff and ensure the protection of staff from allegations of actual or perceived conflict of interest, abuse, exploitation, favouritism, or bias.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all University staff as defined below and relates to students undertaking all modes of study.

3. Definitions

Intimate personal relationship: A romantic, sexual, or close emotional relationship.

Close personal relationship: With a relative or friend; or where there is a significant personal bond; and/or a relationship where there is financial dependence.

University staff: Any employee, worker (including student casual staff), honorary or emeritus staff, volunteers, contractors, and individuals seconded to work at the University.

Excluded Relationships: Pre-existing relationships (e.g. spouses or partners) that began before the student's enrolment or the staff member's employment.

Adult at risk: Someone over the age of 18 who receives or may need community care services by reason of disability, age, or illness and who is or may be unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.

Abuse of power: A situation where a relevant staff member exploits a position of power in relation to a student so as to apply pressure in a way which:

- may result in the student doing something, or refraining from doing something, that they may not otherwise have done; and
- that action or inaction could reasonably result in something that falls within the scope of an intimate personal relationship.

4. Policy Statement

4.1 Intimate personal relationships between staff and students

The University has legal, regulatory, and ethical responsibility to provide a high quality, supportive, inclusive, and safe learning and working environment for our University community. This commitment will enable staff and students to fulfil their personal potential. To enable this, the University expects staff to apply the highest standards of professionalism in all interactions with students.

The nature of staff and student roles means that staff are in a position of power relative to a student, irrespective of the student's age, maturity, and level of study. Therefore, staff must maintain professional boundaries to avoid abuse of trust through the imbalance of power and influence, and to avoid perceived or actual conflicts of interest.

Consequently, subject to the exceptions below, all intimate personal relationships between staff and students are prohibited. This policy covers all areas of the University.

There are some limited exceptions to this approach. Excluded (pre-existing) intimate personal relationships that were in place:

- prior to 1st August 2025; or
- prior to the member of staff or student joining the University

are exempt. In these situations, members of staff should report the relationship immediately to their Academic Director or Head of Professional Service, SMT member and the University's Safeguarding Manager to assess the risk of conflicts of interest and put appropriate protective measures in place, if necessary, such as alternative arrangements for the student's work to be marked and feedback on their performance provided.

Staff must never enter into intimate relationships with students or any other person under the age of 18 or who is an adult at risk. Intimate relationships involving students (including applicants or offer-holders) under the age of 18, where the staff member is in a position of trust or where the student is an adult at risk could fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

4.2 Close personal relationships between staff and students

Staff should not (where possible) enter into a close personal relationship with a student for whom they have a professional responsibility – for example, in the areas of teaching/learning, assessment, selection, pastoral care or research. Close personal relationships can lead to perceived or actual conflicts of interest, which can have a detrimental effect on the teaching and learning environment for other students and staff.

The University appreciates that in exceptional circumstances, a student may opt to take a module, attend a class, or engage in another activity organised by or delivered at the University that is offered by a member of staff with whom they have a close personal or family relationship. Whilst this is not encouraged, arrangements should be made to assess the risk and accommodate the request if there is a case for the student to engage in that activity. The same process should be followed as in 4.1 to assess the risk and put appropriate measures in place if appropriate.

5. Responsibilities of University staff

In order to maintain appropriate relationships with students, staff:

- must ensure interactions with students are always professional and appropriate, and avoid conduct towards students that is in any way sexualised;
- must maintain appropriate professional boundaries and relationships with students based on trust, confidence, and equal treatment of all students;
- must not promise or allude to rewards in return for favours, or suggest or threaten the withdrawal of teaching or other forms of academic support if these are not granted;
- must not connect with students when using data apps nor actively seek student connections whilst on campus;
- should use University email or official channels for communicating with students;
- should adhere to the same guidelines, where logistically possible, when participating in University activities whilst away from the usual workplace; and
- should conduct themselves with common sense and act with professionalism and integrity when interacting with students on social media platforms.

Where staff have a primary role of providing supervision, teaching, or pastoral care to students, staff should:

- ensure that meetings and discussions occur on campus or other University-approved premises. Where this is not possible, ensure the meeting occurs in a neutral public venue;
- refer students with support needs to a relevant University support service and limit their role in providing personal support to a student where this is not part of the employment duties;
- refrain from contacting students outside of reasonable working hours unless there is an urgent or emergency situation and contact needs to be made immediately;
- not seek personal information from a student except as relevant to a University process and in line with the University's [Data Protection Policy](#).

6. How to raise concerns

All reports and disclosures from students about breaches or potential breaches of this policy should be made via the University's [You Report We Support](#) tool.

Where a student is in a relationship with a staff member, or has experienced advances from a staff member, and would like a confidential discussion, they can seek advice and assurance via the [You Report We Support](#) tool.

Where a staff member has concerns about the conduct of another staff member with regards to this policy, they should speak to their Academic Director or Head of Professional Service and Human Resources in the first instance.

7. Breach of Policy

All breaches of this policy will be investigated under the staff Disciplinary Guidelines and Procedure.

Students will not be disciplined for a breach of this policy.

8. Review and Transparency

This policy will be reviewed after the first 12 months of operation and periodically thereafter. Historical versions will be archived and made accessible in accordance with the Office for Students' prominence principles.

Version control

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Policy owner: Director of Human Resources