



UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

AT WORK POLICY

Originated by Registrar & University Secretary:

June 2013

Impact Assessment:

TBC

Approved by Senate:

17 July 2013

Review Date:

July 2015

UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University recognises that, on occasion, staff and students could form relationships which go beyond their professional responsibilities. For example: a family relationship; a commercial relationship; an emotional or sexual relationship. There is concern that such relationships may create a perceived conflict of interest or, under some circumstances, may be unacceptable, unprofessional or harmful. It therefore deems prudent to offer guidance which will protect all parties.
- 1.2 Staff should avoid entering any non-professional relationship with students and consider paragraph 2.2 very cautiously.
- 1.3 There are particular issues with any relationship other than those of family or business with students under the age of 18. Staff who regularly come into contact with students under 18 must familiarise themselves with these issues. Please see paragraph 2.4.
- 1.4 For the purposes of this policy, a 'conflict of interest' is present if there is a potential for the personal interests of an individual to clash with their professional obligations. The eyes of a third party might also perceive what may constitute or lead to a conflict of interest.
- 1.5 This guidance cannot be and does not seek to be exhaustive in its enumeration of examples and potential cases but rather offers a framework of ideas and actions that is intended to convey to all staff and students a correct model of conduct.
- 1.6 This guidance depends for its action on the professional integrity of staff, the maturity of students and the good judgement and common sense of managers and these qualities are always likely to be a more effective guarantee of probity than any set of rules.
- 1.7 Any meritless allegations could be deemed as malicious and subject to disciplinary procedure. Allegations made in good faith will be differentiated between those that are deliberately misleading.

2. Relationships between staff and students

- 2.1 The University believes that the professional relationship between students and staff is vital to a student's educational development and affirms that the teaching relationship is based on trust and confidence. In this context a professional relationship is defined as one where there is an assessing, supervising, tutoring, teaching or pastoral role or a role providing administrative or technical support. Students are entitled to equality of treatment and it is important that a personal relationship between a staff member and a student is not perceived by others to prejudice that equality of treatment.
- 2.2 The University prohibits staff to enter into a personal relationship with a student for whom they have a professional responsibility (assessing, supervising, tutoring, teaching, for pastoral care or for whom they are required to provide administrative or technical support). Such relationships can lead to a lack of confidence in the integrity of due process and perceived or actual conflicts of interest, which can have a detrimental effect on the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues.
- 2.3 Where a staff member does have a professional role in relation to a student with whom (s)he has a personal relationship irrespective of paragraph 2.2, it is the responsibility of the staff member to inform his/her Senior Manager at the earliest possible opportunity.
- 2.4 Any sexual relationship with a student under the age of eighteen is likely to constitute a criminal offence under the 'abuse of trust' provisions of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. This includes relatively minor sexual contact such as kissing. The University deems any sexual relationship with a student under eighteen as professional misconduct subject to disciplinary action, and does not permit it in any circumstances.
- 2.5 Where students are employed part-time by the University they are defined for the purposes of this policy, by their principle status at the institution and not as an employee.
- 2.6 Where staff are also enrolled as students at the University, they are defined for the purposes of this policy by their staff status.
- 2.7 Sabbatical Officers are employed by the Students' Union, a separate entity, and as such are exempt from this policy. However, due to their unique relationship with the University they are advised to refer to their own policies and to this document for guidance.

3. Relationships between colleagues

- 3.1 Staff should declare to his/her line manager any personal relationships which may give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest, trust or breach of confidentiality.

- 3.2 Where a personal relationship exists or develops between colleagues who are in a line management or supervisory relationship at work, when involved in recruitment, selection, appraisal, promotion or in any other management activity or process involving the other party they must adhere to the clear and transparent procedures put in place by the University.
- 3.3 Individuals are expected to manage their own relationships without it impacting on the workplace. If the University believes that the behavior of an individual has resulted in a detrimental impact on the work or study environment of others then the University may take disciplinary action in accordance with the relevant disciplinary procedure.
- 3.4 Colleagues in a personal relationship should not normally work together in any circumstance whereby a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage may be perceived to be gained from the overlap of a personal and professional relationship.
- 3.5 In any such circumstances, the relationship must be declared in confidence to his/her Senior Manager. The manager to whom the information is disclosed will then investigate alternative management arrangements and confirm the outcome to the individuals concerned. If it is considered unavoidable to inform other colleagues about the relationship in order to explain a change in management arrangements, this will be discussed with the individuals concerned, before it is disclosed.

4. Breakdown of relationships

- 4.1 Where personal relationships end it is expected that all parties will continue to conduct themselves in a professional manner in the University and avoid conducting personal disputes which impact on the working environment or other colleagues and students. It may also be appropriate for some of the actions, put in place by the University during the relationship, to continue for a period of time following the end of the relationship. The individual(s) involved will be consulted and required to comply with reasonable actions.

5. Declaration & failure to declare a personal relationship

- 5.1 While not a bar to employment with the University, applicants for employment will be asked to declare any personal relationship with existing staff, students, or members of University Council.
- 5.2 Where a staff member considers that a relationship which s/he has with a student might constitute or lead to a conflict of interest, s/he should inform the appropriate line manager in a confidential meeting. The line manager should then place a confidential note on the individual's central file and this should remain on file during the student's tenure at the University. It should remain on file even if the relationship has come to an end in order to protect both the student and staff member.

The file note should also be placed on the student's file and will remain there permanently to ensure that an evidence trail demonstrating that the University has taken appropriate action is in place. This note should be shown to all concerned but not copied to them.

- 5.3 Failure to declare a personal relationship as defined within this policy may constitute a disciplinary offense i.e. not only when there is an unfair advantage or disadvantage to either of the parties to the relationship.
- 5.4 The student should also be made aware of the declaration, although the onus for declaration remains with the staff member. This would enable both parties to inform the Director of School, Head of Department etc if the status of the relationship altered.
- 5.5 A student may also approach his/her Student Welfare Officer to declare a relationship. If this relationship has not previously been declared by the staff member the Student Welfare Officer should speak with the staff member in confidence and, if appropriate, a file note will be generated as described in paragraph 5.3. This measure is designed to ensure that students have the same rights as staff in the reporting chain, to ensure that their view of what might constitute a conflict of interest is taken into account and also to protect staff against malicious allegations.
- 5.6 When a staff member reports a relationship with a student, the Director of School or Head of Department should agree appropriate arrangements to ensure no conflict of interest arises. For example, normally, the individual concerned would not mark the student's work, teach him or her in a small group or act as the personal tutor. These arrangements should be included in the file note described in paragraph 4.4. In the case of professional service and support staff it would be at the discretion of the manager to decide on whether or not it would be appropriate to limit the professional interactions between the staff and the student in a similar way.

6. Further guidance

- 6.1 Staff may seek guidance on the implementation of this policy, on a confidential basis, from the Director of Human Resources or with a relevant person from Human Resources.
- 6.2 Students may seek guidance on the implementation of the policy on a confidential basis from his/her Student Welfare Officer or from the Deputy University Secretary.

*University Secretariat
July 2013*