

Personal Relationships at Work Policy

Purpose and Context

This policy sets out the expectations of members of staff with respect to personal relationships between students and staff and between colleagues, regardless of sexual orientation or identity.

This policy aims to limit the circumstances where a position of power may be abused or perceived to be abused and seeks to protect students and staff from allegations from actual or perceived conflicts of interest related to personal relationships.

The University aims to ensure a positive, supportive working and learning environment where all students and staff are treated fairly. All declarations made in accordance with this policy will be treated respectfully, sensitively and confidentially.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff employed at the University of Huddersfield.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 All colleagues are in a position of trust, and it is important that all staff members conduct themselves with sound professional judgment, impartiality and integrity.
- 1.2 It is recognised and accepted that socialising on a friendship basis is often a positive aspect of being an active member of the University community. However, the nature of staff / student and staff / staff relationships imposes particular responsibilities and duties on colleagues.
- 1.3 The University requires that if any staff / student or staff / staff relationships exist or arise, they must be conducted with the utmost discretion and entirely outside the professional/academic environment.

2. Relationships with Under 18's or Vulnerable Adults

- 2.1 Members of staff must not be in, or enter into, a close personal or intimate relationship with a student or colleague under the age of 18 or an adult known or suspected to be at risk or vulnerable.
- 2.2 A vulnerable adult includes anyone with a condition or disability (including neurodiversity, mental illness and/or an addiction to alcohol or drugs) if that condition significantly reduces their ability to give informed active consent to the relationship. This could be a lack of capacity to understand and assess the relationship (vulnerability to grooming) or because the impairment changes the balance of power (vulnerability to manipulation, coercion or bullying).

- 2.3 Whilst a young person can consent to sexual activity once they reach the age of 16, the Sexual Offences Act (2003) makes it a criminal offence for a person to engage in sexual activity of any kind with a person under the age of 18, where the adult is in a position of trust, which in the University would be considered a member of staff.
- 2.4 When anyone suspects a member of staff is acting inappropriately towards a student or colleague under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult they must contact the University's Designated Safeguarding Officer who may contact the local authority designated officer and/or the police.
- 2.5 For more information, see <https://www.hud.ac.uk/media/policydocuments/Safeguarding-Policy.pdf> .

3. Relationships with Students

- 3.1 The University acknowledges that all staff have a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interest of the University's students, and that all relationships with them must feature trust, confidence and equal treatment.
- 3.2 Close personal or intimate relationships between staff and students where there is direct supervision of the student are therefore not accepted by the University. Direct supervision includes teaching, assessment, selection, personal tutoring, supervision, mental health or wellbeing support, advisors or guidance support or pastoral care. This list is not exhaustive.
- 3.3 A close personal relationship means a regular and ongoing relationship that is romantic, familial, financial or where there is a significant personal bond, for example a relative, close partner, close family friend, or a relationship where there is an emotional and/or financial dependence. An intimate relationship means any association, however brief, of a sexual or intimate nature, either in person or remotely (for example via social media, email or instant messaging),
- 3.4 If a member of staff finds themselves in this position i.e engaged in a relationship with a student under their direct supervision, they must disclose this to their line manager at the start of any relationship however that is defined. This situation may arise, if for example the member of staff was in an existing personal or close relationship with a student prior to either party joining the University or if the student changed course. Details of the relationship must be recorded on Form A and submitted to Human Resources (hr@hud.ac.uk) where the information will be held confidentially.
- 3.5 Following submission of Form A consideration will be given to alternative arrangements to reduce or eliminate the potential for conflicts of interests arising. Alternative arrangements may include not having sole responsibility for aspects of the student's work that require judgement and not being solely in a position to take decision affecting the student (e.g. marking, supervising a PhD student, allocation of places on courses).
- 3.6 All staff at the University are in a position of authority over students, which can create an imbalance of power, and therefore the University strongly discourages developing a close personal relationship with a student, even

where there is no direct supervision. Engaging in a relationship with a student could still compromise the professional relationship making active consent difficult or impossible to obtain. The member of staff must therefore disclose any close personal relationship they have with a student to their line manager.

- 3.7 Active consent means that both parties must have the capacity to agree to a relationship or physical intimacy freely, and without fear of negative consequences. For active consent to be present, both parties must be able to withdraw from the relationship or physical intimacy at any time without fear of negative consequences. This can therefore be difficult to attain where there is an imbalance of power because the party who has less power has less capacity to withdraw freely.

4. Relationships between Colleagues

- 4.1 It is recognised that colleagues may form mutually rewarding working relationships and personal friendships. It is also recognised that some relationships in the workplace contain the potential for a conflict of interest or an imbalance of power.
- 4.2 If a member of staff has close personal relationships or intimate relationships (past or present) with work colleagues that may influence or be perceived to influence the ability for them to carry out their role these must be disclosed to their line manager. Details of the relationship must be recorded on Form A and submitted to Human Resources (hr@hud.ac.uk) where the information will be held confidentiality.
- 4.3 A close personal relationship means a regular and ongoing relationship that is romantic, familial, financial or where there is a significant personal bond, for example a relative, close partner, close family friend, or a relationship where there is an emotional and/or financial dependence. An intimate relationship means any association, however brief, of a sexual or intimate nature, either in person or remotely (for example via social media, email or instant messaging),
- 4.4 Following submission of Form A consideration will be given to alternative arrangements to reduce or eliminate the potential for conflicts of interests arising. Alternative arrangements may include not being involved in formal processes or activities concerning the other party such as the PDPR process, promotion or approving expenses.
- 4.5 Where a member of staff fails to declare this information and it is found to have created a conflict or perceived conflict of interest, disciplinary action will be taken against all parties.
- 4.6 A member of staff does not have to declare a relationship with a colleague where there is no influence on the ability for them to carry out their role. An example of this may be colleagues that work in different Schools or Professional Services however this will depend on the interaction between their roles. To seek further guidance the member of staff should speak with their line manager or Human Resources. The line manager and / or Human

Resources will work with the member of staff to seek to resolve any concerns that the member of staff may have.

5. Breach of Policy

- 5.1 It is not a breach of policy where a relationship exists prior to a member of staff directly supervising a student e.g. the student changes courses or the relationship started before the student joined the University. However, it is expected in these circumstances that the member of staff declares this to their line manager immediately to ensure that alternative arrangements can be considered.
- 5.2 Where a member of staff has not declared a relationship with a student where there is direct supervision, and it is brought to the University's attention, the member of staff will be subject to investigation in accordance with the University Disciplinary Procedure.
- 5.3 Failure to disclose a close personal or intimate relationship with a colleague that may influence or be perceived to influence their ability to carry out their role, will be investigated as a disciplinary matter.

Appendix A - Form A

Please complete Form A and send it securely to Human Resources (hr@hud.ac.uk) following the discussion with your line manager. If you have any queries about completing this form, please contact your HR Business Partner.

Name	
Job Title	
School / Professional Service/ Department	
Line Manager / Job Title	
Other party's details	
Name	
Are they a student or a member of staff?	
Job Title (if member of staff)	
School / Professional Service/ Department	
Nature of Relationship: (Please explain if relationship is of a close personal nature, for example a close friend or relative, or an intimate /romantic relationship)	
Relationship of close personal nature (if relevant) for example cousin, mother, friend etc.	
When did the close personal/intimate relationship start (if relevant) (approximate month/year)?	
<p>I understand the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It may be necessary for permanent or temporary changes to be made to any supervisory arrangements or other conditions, to remove any real or perceived conflict of interest arising from the relationship. 2. This form will be stored securely on my HR file and in line with data protection and the Staff Privacy Notice. The information will be shared on a need-to-know basis with those internal individuals, schools or departments identified who reasonably need to be aware of the relevant information in order to assess and manage any risks associated with the declarations. 3. I have read and understood the Personal Relationships at Work Policy <p>Name:</p> <p>Signed:</p> <p>Date:</p>	

Appendix B – Definitions

Abuse of power: Abuse of power is where someone uses their position of power or authority in an unacceptable manner. Abuse of power can take various forms and may include, but is not limited to, grooming, manipulation, coercion, putting pressure on others to engage in conduct they do not feel comfortable with.

Adult at risk / Vulnerable Adult: An adult at risk is someone over the age of 18 who receives or may need, community care services by reason of disability or illness and as a result of those needs is unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation. This can relate to physical, mental or psychological wellbeing or the potential to be drawn into sexual or criminal exploitation and activity. The definition of vulnerable adults includes anyone with a condition or disability (including neurodiversity, long or short-term health conditions, mental illnesses or substance addition) if that condition significantly reduces their ability to give informed active consent to the relationship. This could be a lack of capacity to understand and assess the relationship (vulnerability to grooming) or because the impairment changes the balance of power (vulnerability to manipulation, coercion or bullying).

Close Friend: This is someone who you know well, spend time with socially, and have a loyalty to.

Close personal relationships: A close personal relationship means a regular and ongoing relationship that is romantic, familial, financial, or where there is a significant personal bond. For example, a relative, partner, close family friend, close friend, or a relationship where there is an emotional and/or financial dependence.

Consent: Consent is agreeing by choice and having the freedom and capacity to make that choice. The person seeking consent should always take steps to ensure that consent is freely given, that it is informed and recognises that it can be withdrawn at any time.

Direct Supervision: This includes assessment, selection, teaching, tutoring, mental health support, support during off-campus activities such as fieldtrips, wellbeing support, advisors, guidance work, or pastoral care.

Family friend: a person who has relations with your family.

Freedom to consent: a person is free to make a choice if nothing negative would happen to them if they said no. For example, a person is not free to choose if:

- they are being threatened with violence (by the perpetrator and/or by someone else)
- they are being threatened with humiliation
- they believe that the continuation or assessment of their studies, or progression or advancement of their career, will be at risk, if they refused
- they are being blackmailed
- there is a significant power imbalance and the party without power feels pressured to continue in the relationship against their will.

Capacity to consent: Capacity is about whether someone is physically and/or mentally able to make a choice and to understand the consequences of that choice. For example, a person does not have the capacity to give consent if they are asleep or unconscious. A person's capacity to consent may be inhibited by the influence of drugs or alcohol or the presence of a cognitive or learning difficulty, or mental health condition.

Grooming: Grooming can be defined as a gradual process that someone in a position of power uses to manipulate someone to do things they may not be comfortable with and to make them less likely to reject or report abusive behaviour. Grooming will initially start as befriending someone and making them feel special and may result in sexual abuse and/or exploitation.

Influence or Perceived Influence: Influence is defined as being able to affect a person or its the power that someone has over someone. Examples where influence could occur or be perceived to occur include:

- being more senior in grade
- being on an open contract rather than a precarious contract of employment
- being part of a recruitment process
- assessing an individual's performance and carrying out a PDR
- input into a promotion or pay review
- line managing day to day duties and responsibilities
- authorising expenditure
- offering opportunities for development

This list is not exhaustive.

Intimate relationship: An intimate relationship means any association, however brief, of a sexual or other intimate nature, either in person or remotely (for example via social media, email or text messaging).

Position of Trust: Any colleague working closely with children, young people or adults at risk, is in a position of trust.

Spouse/Civil Partner: The person you are legally married to or the legally recognised union with rights similar to those of marriage

POLICY SIGN-OFF AND OWNERSHIP DETAILS

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REVISION HISTORY

Version	Date	Revision description/Summary of changes	Author
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V1.2	November 2019	Formatting updates (minor amends not requiring committee approval) and transference to new template.	HR Manager
V1.3	February 2022	Formatting updates (minor amends not requiring committee approval).	HR Manager
V.2	January 2026	Formal Review in consultation with Trade Unions	Head of HR / Director of HR