

Personal Relationships Between Staff and Students Policy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The University of East Anglia is committed to fostering a safe, inclusive environment where all members of our community feel welcomed, respected, and treated fairly. We celebrate diversity and are committed to providing equal opportunities for everyone.
- 1.2 This policy has been developed to provide guidance to all employees regarding entering or having personal relationships in the workplace with students and vice versa, with an aim of minimising potential or perceived conflicts of interest and to protect all parties from complaint or misuse of an individual's power.
- 1.3 Conflicts of interest may arise in several aspects, including but not limited to, being involved in the academic assessment of the student, the award of a scholarship or prize to the student, or the administration of the student's record.
- 1.4 The University view is that a professional relationship between employees and students is paramount to maintain professional integrity and fulfil their responsibility to the development and wellbeing needs of the student.
- 1.5 Personal relationships can take several forms, including, but not limited to, emotional, sexual, marital, or material and are not always in person, for instance a relationship can take place by social media, email, or text.
- 1.6 The University has a legal and moral responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of both its employees and students. Therefore, the University requires its employees and students to disclose any personal intimate relationships linked to the workplace/place of study. The University's intention is to ensure that professional integrity is maintained that individuals are not put in a vulnerable position and appropriate precautionary measures are put in place.
- 1.7 This policy is underpinned by the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy and Dignity and Respect in the Workplace Policy and accompanying guidance which can be found on the University's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policies and Guidance webpage, alongside the University's Conflict of Interest Policy.
- 1.8 This policy should be read alongside other important University documents like Grievance and Disciplinary and Safeguarding.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all University employees (including prospective employees), plus individuals who hold an honorary appointment, a secondment contract,

individuals doing work experience, self-employed individuals, student workers, and those on temporary or associate tutor contracts.

- 2.2 The University also expects other workers who are not employees like service users, individuals employed by other organisations, and suppliers/contractors (third parties) to behave in a manner that aligns with the expectations set out for workers.
- 2.3 The University considers a student to be an individual who is registered as a student (undergraduate or postgraduate) and may also be a worker/employee and student at the University, is a visiting student from another university, is a student on a university delivered course, or is a student of another educational institution based on the UEA campus.

3.0 Relationships between employees/workers and students

- 3.1 The University considers that personal relationships between employees and students potentially can have a serious impact on the inherent balance of authority, trust, integrity, and equal treatment that is formed in a professional relationship between employees and a student.
- 3.2 Moving the boundaries of the professional relationship can lead to perceived or actual conflicts of interest, which can have a detrimental impact on the teaching and learning environment for other students and employees. The employee is in a position of trust and power and their primary responsibility is for the protection of the student.
- 3.3 Employees should not be in a relationship with a student that they are supervising on a research degree as primary or secondary supervisor. This could lead to significant issues with an impact on the student's thesis, award outcome, future funding, publications, networking and/or career opportunities.
- 3.4 The University is mindful that personal relationships may form or may pre-exist when a student or employees joins the University and respects that individuals are entitled to their privacy. However, employees may leave themselves vulnerable to complaints from the student and others regarding their exploitation of the authority and trust of their relationship. As such, to protect both parties the University strongly advises employees not to form a personal relationship with a student and to recognise and respect the professional boundaries.
- 3.5 If an individual believes that an employee and/or student is behaving in a manner that is potentially crossing over the boundary between professional and personal with a student or employee, it is important that in a timely manner it is brought to the attention of the Head of School, Head of Professional Service or the Director of Student Services so it can be investigated. Individuals can also discuss the matter on a confidential basis with a member of the HR Business Partnering Team or Head of Student Services.

4.0 Disclosure of a personal relationship

- 4.1 Employees must declare to their Head of School/Head of Professional Service or designated deputy any new or pre-existing personal relationship. They will discuss with the employee whether any precautions need to be put in place to minimise any

conflict of interest and agree with the employee the action that may be necessary. Further information can be found in the University's Conflict of Interest Policy.

- 4.2 Where an employee does not feel comfortable sharing this information within their line management structure, an individual can discuss their disclosure with the HR Business Partnering Team on a confidential basis. For example, this may occur where an individual may not wish to disclose their sexual orientation, or their involvement in a polyamorous relationship. The HR Business Partnering Team will discuss the individual's situation to establish whether there may be the need for precautions to be considered and if so, agree the next steps regarding informing the appropriate manager in their area.
- 4.3 Students should contact Student Services to declare any new or pre-existing personal relationship.
- 4.4 The University will treat in confidence all declarations and will ensure that this confidence is maintained. The manager will hold a file note regarding the declaration and precautions put in place on the individual's personal file.
- 4.5 The University will ensure that individuals are treated fairly and with dignity and respect, and in so far as is possible are not placed at a disadvantage in respect of their professional or academic progression.

5.0 Responsibility of all employees/workers

- 5.1 It is the responsibility of the employee and not the student to ensure both the professional and ethical aspects in the employee/student relationship are acknowledged and maintained. The employee is in a position of trust and power and their primary responsibility is for the protection of the student.
- 5.2 All employees are expected to behave in a professional manner consistent with their role and responsibilities and in accordance with the University's range of Policies, Guidance and Procedures.
- 5.3 Employees must disclose an employee/student personal relationship in a timely manner. If an individual is unsure whether they should disclose a relationship, they can approach their manager on a confidential basis. Further information can be found in the University's Conflict of Interest Policy.
- 5.4 Employees who have a professional registration, for example to the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), General Medical Council (GMC), Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) or Health Professions Council (HPC), are responsible for ensuring that they are familiar with the standards of conduct, performance and ethics for their profession and ensure that any relationship with a student does not breach these standards.
- 5.5 Being in a position of trust and entering a relationship with an individual under the age of eighteen or a vulnerable adult could fall within the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Therefore, employees must not enter sexual, intimate, or close relationships with a student under the age of eighteen or a vulnerable adult.
- 5.6 The employee must co-operate with their manager in the process of discussing and putting in place any precautionary measures and comply with the actions.

- 5.7 If an employee fails to declare a relationship with a student or chooses not to comply with any reasonable precautionary measures put in place disciplinary action may be taken by the University. This could range from informal advisory comments/warning through to a formal action commensurate with the circumstances of the case.

6.0 Responsibility of all managers

- 6.1 The manager must discuss the disclosure with the employee and the student to identify whether any precautions need to be put in place to minimise any conflict of interest and agree any actions considered necessary.
- 6.2 The manager will consider re-organising duties and minimising contact within the professional environment. This could include re-organising advising, supervision or pastoral responsibilities; re-organising assessment and administrative responsibilities; allocating an additional internal or external co-supervisor.
- 6.3 The manager must keep on file a confidential written record of the declaration and precautionary actions taken.
- 6.4 The manager may wish to discuss and seek advice and support on a confidential basis from their manager or the HR Business Partnering Team.
- 6.5 The manager must ensure they treat the employee and student fairly and with dignity and respect and in doing so be mindful of any unconscious bias they may have.
- 6.6 The University has an increased duty of care for students and employees under 18, as defined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Our Safeguarding Policy and Admission Policy for Under-18s outline support measures, including a designated Child Protection Officer. Managers must adhere to these policies if they suspect or are aware of any relationships involving individuals under 18 or vulnerable adults.

7.0 Responsibilities of students

- 7.1 All students are expected to behave in an appropriate manner in accordance with the University's range of Policies, Guidance and Procedures relating to Equality and Diversity, Dignity and Respect, and any University Regulations relating to their student status.
- 7.2 Students should disclose an employee/student personal relationship in a timely manner. If an individual is unsure whether they should disclose a relationship, they can approach the Student Services on a confidential basis.
- 7.3 Students who have a professional registration, for example to the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), General Medical Council (GMC), Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) or Health Professions Council (HPC), are responsible for ensuring that they are familiar with the standards of conduct, performance and ethics for their profession and ensure that any relationship with an employee does not breach these standards.
- 7.4 Students under the age of eighteen and those who may be vulnerable adults need to be mindful of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and must not enter into a sexual, intimate or close relationship with an employee.

- 7.5 If an individual believes that an employee and/or student is behaving in a manner that is potentially crossing over the boundary between professional and personal with a student or employee and could impact on the University's duty of care, it is important that in a timely manner it is brought to the attention of the Head of School, Head of Professional Service or Director of Student Services so it can be investigated. Individuals can also discuss the matter on a confidential basis with the Head of Student Services.
- 7.6 The student must co-operate with the University in the process of discussing and putting in place any precautionary measures and comply with the actions.
- 7.7 If a student does not comply with any reasonable precautionary measures put in place formal action may be taken by the University.

8.0 Non-consensual relationships or unwanted behaviour

- 8.1 The University operates a zero-tolerance approach to behaviours of discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment), bullying and victimisation as outlined in the Dignity and Respect Policy. Zero tolerance means that:

- (i) we will act and
- (ii) the action will be proportionate to the circumstances of the case.

Individuals do not have to tolerate such inappropriate behaviour or believe that it is their fault.

- 8.2 Stalking is a criminal offence. The Crown Prosecution Service gives examples of stalking as: following a person, watching, or spying on them or forcing contact with the victim through any means, including social media or via other digital methods for example using spyware.
- 8.3 The University encourages individuals who have experienced or witness stalking, whether on the UEA campus/Norwich Research Park or off campus, including when visiting placement sites or other sites, to report it to the University and/or to the Police.
- 8.4 If an employee experiences unwanted attention, unwanted advances and/or other unwanted behaviour, the employee should contact their line manager.
- 8.5 If a student experiences unwanted attention, unwanted advances and/or other unwanted behaviour, or is in a non-consensual relationship, the student should contact Student Services who can provide advice and support.

9.0 Advice and guidance

- 9.1 The following can be contacted for advice and support and signposting, including where there is a breakdown in an employee /student relationship:
- Employee's/Worker's Line Manager.
 - HR Business Partnering Team
 - A Wellbeing Ambassador
 - Employee Wellbeing pages
 - Campus Trade Union representative (UCU, UNISON, UNITE)
 - Postgraduate Research Service (Postgraduate Researchers)

- Student Services (Undergraduate & Postgraduate students)

10.0 Monitoring and Review

- 10.1 The University's People and Culture Division will monitor and review the implementation of this policy. The University will continue to monitor its policies, procedures, and practices and provide necessary training and awareness.

Governance	Detail
Policy owner	People and Culture Division (EDI Team)
Underlying legislation	Equality Act 2010
Approved by	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee
Review date(s)	October 2024
Future review date	October 2026 or sooner if legislative changes take place.
Enquires	Matthew Gooch, Head of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion