

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK POLICY

Brief Description (max 50 words)	Personal relationships at work policy for UoS employees
Target Audience	All University of Suffolk (UoS) employees.
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Stakeholders engaged in development or review	PPC
Equality Impact Assessment Personal Relationships at Work Policy EIA.pdf	This document has been assessed for equality impact on the protected groups, as set out in the Equality Act 2010. This Policy is applicable to every member of staff within UoS irrespective of their age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief, marriage, or civil partnership, and those who work on behalf of UoS.

Amendment History

Version	Date	Reviewer Name(s)	Summary of changes
2.0	November 2024	POD Team	Updated template

This Policy sets out University of Suffolk's position concerning close personal relationships at work. The purpose of the Policy is to avoid giving an unfair advantage/disadvantage (actual, potential or perceived) to students, staff and other people arising from close personal relationships.

1. SCOPE

This policy applies to all staff whatever their job type or level within the University.

There is a separate policy concerning harassment and bullying which may be relevant for some people in the context of close relationships. Details can be found on MySuffolk.

2. DEFINITION

For the purposes of this policy, close personal relationships may be defined as those which are personal, romantic, sexual, or familial relationships.

3. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STAFF AND STUDENTS

Staff have a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students.

The relationship between staff and students is not generally an equal one. Staff embarking on a romantic/sexual relationship with a student may consider this to be consensual and equal. However, such relationships carry considerable risk. The student may become isolated from their peers and may become extremely distressed if the relationship ends, adversely affecting their mental and physical health. The member of staff may find themselves the subject of a complaint of harassment if the student decides the relationship is not truly consensual or if the relationship breaks down. Such relationships can also impact adversely on other students and staff, since they can create tension, rumours and secrecy, and perceptions of preferential or different treatment. Problems of this kind may result in complaints from third parties which may lead to formal investigations.

While most students are over 18 years old and regarded as adults in law. In the case of students under the age of 18, or students who are vulnerable adults, the inequality in relationships between staff and students is even greater.

Having taken these factors into account, the following statements set out University of Suffolk's position concerning relationships between staff and students:

- i. Close relationships of a personal/romantic/sexual nature between staff and students are strongly discouraged.
- ii. Close relationships of a romantic/sexual nature between staff and students under the age of 18 years, or students who are vulnerable adults, are normally forbidden and will usually lead to disciplinary action being taken against the member of staff, possibly leading to dismissal. In this context, vulnerable adults include those with learning disabilities and/or those with mental health problems affecting their ability to make sound judgements.
- iii. Staff engaged in a close personal relationship with a student whom they teach/assess must notify their line manager immediately so that arrangements for demonstrably impartial assessment can be made. Any member of staff failing to follow this requirement is likely to become the subject of disciplinary proceedings.
- iv. Any member of staff engaged in a close personal relationship with a student must alert their manager of this situation. The line manager will work with that member of staff to ensure no inappropriate professional contact with or influence on the student's activities occurs or could reasonably be perceived.

4. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEMBERS OF STAFF

It is not uncommon for close relationships to develop between people who work together. These may be close friendships or may involve romantic/sexual relationships. Further, members of the same family often work for the same employer.

Relationships between staff may become a problem where there is the potential for a conflict of interest, where influence may be exerted (but one individual may not be a direct line manager to the other, ie. Dean/Director or Head of Service who may be able to influence proceedings involving a partner, friend or family member) or where the relationship affects conduct or behaviours at work. In order to avoid such difficulties, University of Suffolk has adopted the following guidelines:

1. Where a close personal relationship exists or develops between a line manager and a member of their staff, the members of staff **must** declare their relationship to the next tier of management. It may be necessary, in these circumstances, to review the relevant reporting structure.
2. Where a close personal relationship exists or develops between any two members of staff, it may be necessary to make special arrangements in order to safeguard people's perceived professional integrity. In the interests of all concerned, members of staff in these or similar circumstances must declare their relationship to the next tier of management. Where such a relationship exists relevant members of the team/University will also be made aware as appropriate, including where new staff join the team/University as necessary.
3. Where a close personal relationship exists or develops between two members of the same team, and there is evidence that the relationship is interfering with the work of that team (and reasonable attempts have been made to resolve any conflict or address the interference with the smooth running of the team), it may be necessary to explore the possibility of one party being moved to another area of work. In such a situation, if it is not possible to transfer at least one of the employees (for example if no suitable vacancies exist, or if an employee refuses to transfer), the University reserves the right to dismiss one or both employees (with notice in accordance with the employee's contract or pay in lieu of notice). Dismissal would, however, be undertaken as a last resort in circumstances where no other course of action was reasonably open to the University.
4. If a member of staff has a close personal relationship with an applicant for employment or supplier, they **must** declare an interest and would normally be asked not to be involved with the appointment process.

5 CONFIDENTIALITY

Information about close personal relationships will be treated in confidence, wherever possible. However, it may be necessary and appropriate for such disclosures to be shared, on a need to know basis, with other staff who may otherwise be unclear as to how to proceed.

6 FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

University of Suffolk's policy with regard to possible conflicts of interests in financial and/or contractual matters is set out in the Financial Regulations.

