

GUIDELINES ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

This guide is intended to provide information to employees regarding personal relationships within the College in order to avoid any perceived, actual or potential conflicts of interest or misuse of authority.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The College values and relies upon the professional integrity of its employees, particularly where an employee has supervisory responsibilities or a professional relationship with a student.
- 1.2** So that employees conduct themselves and are perceived to conduct themselves in a professional manner, it is necessary to recognise and take account of personal relationships which might affect working relationships.
- 1.3** The College is committed to promoting equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination. Accordingly, these guidelines will be applied fairly and consistently and with due regard to equality of treatment.
- 1.4** The guidelines do not form part of employees' contracts of employment. They will be kept under review and may be revised from time to time.

2. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 2.1** The guidelines apply to all individuals working at all levels and grades, including full time and part time employees.
- 2.2** In the context of these guidelines:
 - (a) a 'personal relationship' is a personal relationship which is:
 - (i) a family relationship;
 - (ii) a business/commercial/financial relationship; or
 - (iii) a sexual/romantic relationship; and
 - (b) a 'working relationship' is any situation in which individuals will interact in the course of their day-to-day work. This includes situations where one of the individuals in the personal relationship is not an employee of the College. For example, they might be an agency worker, or work for a contractor.
- 2.3** The guidelines apply to personal relationships between:
 - (a) employees of the College;
 - (b) an employee of the College and an agency worker, casual worker, consultant, contractor or supplier, and/or
 - (c) an employee of the College and a current student of the College.

2.4 Although most social and personal relationships need not present a difficulty, it is recognised that there will be certain circumstances where employees may need to avoid taking certain decisions or undertaking certain roles in order to protect themselves and the College from any potential allegations of impropriety, unfair bias, abuse of power or conflict of interest.

2.5 These guidelines are therefore intended to:

- (a) provide guidance in areas where a personal relationship overlaps with any working relationship and particularly where it might cause:
 - (i) a conflict of interest (for example where an employee's personal interests clash with their professional obligations);
 - (ii) breach of confidentiality;
 - (iii) unfair advantage; or
 - (iv) allegations of abuse of power;
- (b) ensure that an employee in a personal relationship is not open to allegations that it has affected a working relationship; and
- (c) enable the situation to be managed, if considered necessary, with a view to avoiding difficulties within any working relationship.

3. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND/OR AGENCY WORKERS, CASUAL WORKERS, CONSULTANTS, CONTRACTORS OR SUPPLIERS

3.1 To maintain professionalism and avoid embarrassment to others, an employee in a personal relationship should avoid public displays of affection in the workplace. This includes, for example, kissing, touching and holding hands.

3.2 Where an employee is in a line management or supervisory position, that employee must not be involved in any recruitment, appraisal, promotion, disciplinary or grievance process or in any other process involving the other. Where authorisation is required for any financial matters e.g. expenses claims/salary changes or allocation of external funding for an employee with whom a personal relationship has been declared, additional independent authorisation must be sought.

3.3 When an employee has been in a personal relationship, but it has come to an end, they must throughout remain professional and ensure that the ending of the relationship does not affect their work or their working relationships.

3.4 Employees should at all times conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their role and duties and the College's policies and procedures (including those relating to equality and diversity and dignity at work).

4. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND CURRENT STUDENTS

4.1 It is vital that trust and confidence exist between employees and students to ensure that students maximise their learning experience. The professional relationship between a student and an employee of the College is a central part of the student's educational development. A personal relationship could compromise this professional relationship and damage the teaching and learning environment for other students and employees.

4.2 Employees are strongly discouraged from entering into a personal relationship with a student they are responsible for teaching, tutoring, supervising or assessing. It would be considered unprofessional

for an employee to seek actively to initiate a personal relationship without regard to the problems that may ensue.

- 4.3 If a consensual personal relationship does develop between an employee of the College and a student they are responsible for teaching, tutoring, supervising or assessing, the employee must declare the relationship to their line manager without delay. Any such disclosure will be treated sensitively.
- 4.4 The College reserves the right to discontinue the responsibility of the member of staff for teaching, tutoring or supervising a student with whom they have a personal relationship.
- 4.5 In no circumstances will an employee be permitted to take part in the assessment of a student with whom they have a personal relationship.
- 4.6 In the event that the supervision of a Post-Graduate student involves two employees who are in a personal relationship, a third supervisor should always be assigned.

5. CONFIDENTIAL DECLARATION OF A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP IN A LINE MANAGEMENT OR SUPERVISORY WORKING RELATIONSHIP

- 5.1 Where a personal relationship exists or develops within a line management or supervisory working relationship, the line manager's manager must be informed. Upon receiving this information, the line manager should seek further guidance from Human Resources.
- 5.2 Employees may be reluctant to disclose their personal relationship, but it is important that the College is able to assess any risk of conflict of interest, unfair advantage or breach of confidentiality and discuss with employees concerned, ways in which such issues can be avoided.
- 5.3 Information relating to a disclosure of a relationship will be handled with confidence. Employees will be treated with sensitivity during this process.
- 5.4 Upon learning of the personal relationship, the College will consider what, if any, steps need to be taken. Due regard will be given to the potential effect of the relationship on others in the College, any potential negative effect on the workings of a department or team and the professional conduct of the College's business.
- 5.5 The employee concerned will be consulted with a view to reaching agreement regarding the appropriate action. No action will be taken without first discussing it fully with the employee concerned.
- 5.6 The College may, at its discretion, make alternative management arrangements. This may include transferring some of an employee's duties or transferring an employee to another department. Any actions to be taken will be confirmed in writing to any employee concerned.
- 5.7 In no circumstances will an employee be permitted to appraise another employee with whom they have a personal relationship, nor will they be permitted to sign off expenses or other administrative documentation.
- 5.8 If it is considered necessary to inform other employees about the personal relationship (for example, in order to explain a change in management arrangements) this will be discussed first with the employee concerned.
- 5.9 If the circumstances of the personal relationship change, the employee must also advise their line manager, who may seek advice from Human Resources. The previously agreed actions will be reviewed in consultation with the employee and any further appropriate action taken.

6. PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS NOT IN A LINE MANAGEMENT OR SUPERVISORY WORKING RELATIONSHIP

- 6.1 Even where there is no managerial/supervisory relationship with an employee in a personal relationship, there may still be a risk of a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage being perceived to be gained from the overlap of a personal and working relationship.
- 6.2 Where there is any possibility of conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage, the relationship should also be declared as above.
- 6.3 An employee should seek the guidance of Human Resources if in any doubt as to whether or not there is or might be a risk of a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage.
- 6.4 Upon learning of the personal relationship, the College will consider what, if any, steps need to be taken, as above.
- 6.5 The line manager/head of department, in consultation with HR, may consider transferring one party or both parties, making alternative line management or supervisory arrangements or implementing other appropriate arrangements to eliminate the conflict of interest, depending on the circumstances. In very rare circumstances, such alternative arrangements may not be feasible and the College may then have to consider dismissing one or both parties.

7. FAILURE TO DISCLOSE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP IN ACCORDANCE WITH THESE GUIDELINES

- 7.1 In the event that an employee fails to declare a personal relationship where required to do so in accordance with these guidelines, or where it would have been prudent to do so, disciplinary action will be taken. Serious cases will be dealt with as gross misconduct.

8. HARASSMENT & BULLYING

- 8.1 Employees are reminded that unwanted attention given by either party, whether at work or outside work (for example, when a personal relationship has ended) could constitute bullying and/or harassment. In such cases disciplinary action may be taken. Serious cases will be dealt with as gross misconduct.

9. DATA PROTECTION

- 9.1 Any personal data provided to the College as a result of this policy will be treated in accordance with the principles set out in the Data Protection Act 1998.

10. FURTHER GUIDANCE

- 10.1 Employees may seek further guidance, on a confidential basis, from the HR department.