

Policy on Consensual Relations between Staff and Students

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy seeks to maintain professional standards of conduct and safeguard the interests of students and staff in the event of a consensual relationship developing between a member of staff and a student. The term 'consensual relationship' describes a situation where a staff member and a student willingly embark on a romantic/sexual relationship.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all staff members, both full and part-time, employed on permanent and temporary contracts and students that are employed as Wardens or Sub-Wardens.
- 2.2 This policy does not apply to students of the University who take up employment as temporary casually employed staff. However, in such circumstances the possible impact of any relationships on service delivery needs to be considered and appropriate conduct should be determined in accordance with the duties and responsibilities of the post.
- 2.3 This policy applies irrespective of sexual orientation.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 A **professional relationship** is defined as any where there is:
- Assessment
 - Supervising
 - Tutoring
 - Teaching

- A pastoral role
- 3.2 A **vulnerable adult** is defined as a person aged 18 or over, “who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation”¹

4. Policy

- 4.1 The University believes the professional relationship between a student and a staff member is a central part of the student’s educational development. It is vital that trust and confidence exist between staff and students to ensure students maximise their learning experience.
- 4.2 Staff have a professional duty to support their students’ abilities and a responsibility to safeguard students’ welfare. Given the imbalance of power between staff and students, any abuse, or perceived abuse, by staff of this relationship will be viewed with concern.
- 4.3 It is the view of the University that any sexual relationship with a student under the age of 18 years and those over the age of 18 who can be regarded as vulnerable adults will be considered gross misconduct by that staff member and will result in dismissal.
- 4.4 Staff members are warned that a sexual/romantic relationship with any student they are responsible for teaching, supervising or assessing is particularly sensitive as it compromises the professional relationship between staff and students, and potentially damages the teaching and learning environment for other students and staff members. With regard to research supervisors, they should take particular care due to the one-to-one nature of the relationship.
- 4.5 Although the University discourages such relationships in general and regards it as unprofessional for a staff member to actively seek to initiate such a relationship or to pursue such a relationship without regard to the problems which may ensue, it also recognises that human beings do become attracted to and involved with one another without deliberate intent and that such relationships may be genuinely affectionate, desired by both parties and impossible to stifle.
- 4.6 Should a relationship develop between a staff member and a student, the staff member must declare that relationship to their line manager by completing a Declaration of Consensual Relationship proforma. In the case of academic staff, the line manager should transfer teaching and assessment of that student and relevant cohort to another staff member. Where this is impossible given the subject or alternative available

¹ Source – Department of Health Publication “No Secrets” 2000

staffing, arrangements must be made to ensure that the staff member does not directly assess the student's work. In cases of other staff members, the line manager should ensure that the nature of any relationship does not influence the service provided to any student. Failure to declare a relationship may lead to disciplinary action. The completed proforma will be kept securely in the Human Resources Department.

4.7 Staff members should be assured that all such declarations of consensual relationships with students will be treated in confidence.

4.8 The University further requires that if such relationships arise, they must be conducted with the utmost discretion and entirely outside the professional environment.

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