



University of Greater Manchester

Policy on Consensual Relationships

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The University of Greater Manchester is committed to providing a positive and safe environment for its educational community to study and work. This policy sets out the expectations and obligations of the University with respect to personal relationships between either students and employees or between employees.
- 1.2 This policy has been developed following the Office for Students' Condition of Registration [E6, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct](#), which introduces requirements for institutions to protect students from harassment and sexual misconduct.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to:
 - **all University employees:** the term 'employee' is used to include all individuals employed or engaged by the University, whether paid or unpaid, to carry out work for the University. This includes (without limitation) University employees/staff, members of the University Executive team, board members and external members of University committees, agency workers, temporary supply staff; honorary and emeritus staff, tutors including variable hours tutors, supervisors, contractors, volunteers, research staff, students undertaking paid or unpaid work for the University.
 - **all University students:** any person registered on a programme of study at the University, including summer/evening school or short courses, including (without limitation) students studying off campus and away from University premises as part of their course/programme of study.
- 2.2 At different times, or concurrently, individuals could fall within or move between different relationship categorisations, such as a student who also works for the University as an employee. In such cases, the person should act in accordance with the requirements that apply to **both** staff and students.
- 2.3 This policy applies to consensual personal relationships between employees, or employees and students. It has been developed to provide employees and students with information on the University of Greater Manchester's

expectations regarding conflicts of interest and relationships, the associated dangers of these and the reporting requirements.

- 2.4 Students should also familiarise themselves with the separate 'Students' Dignity at Study Policy and Procedure' available at <https://www.bolton.ac.uk/assets/Uploads/studentpolicy2526/Students-Dignity-at-Study-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>, which covers the University's Policy and Procedure on Harassment, Bullying, Discrimination, Victimisation and Sexual Misconduct.

3. General

- 3.1 The term 'consensual relationship' describes a situation where two individuals at the University willingly embark on an intimate personal relationship, (which is typically romantic / sexual in nature), as defined in appendix A of this policy. One view is that such relationships are equal adult-to-adult relationships and that interference would infringe on personal freedom. However, there are a number of situations in the employment and educational contexts where such relationships may create a conflict of interest, breach of trust or compromise duty of care (eg. family relationship, business, commercial or financial relationship).
- 3.2 Whilst the existence of existing consensual relationships between employees or employees and students does not necessarily constitute a bar to employment for the employee concerned, it is incumbent on employees to disclose all such relationships and Human Resources (HR) will log and record this information centrally, sensitively and in line with the requirements of data protection laws.
- 3.3 Conflicts of interest, trust and/or confidentiality could arise in the following situations:
- teaching, learning and research;
 - student welfare and pastoral support;
 - access to student services including financial assistance and other student services;
 - participating in a recruitment and retention activity where there is a personal relationship with a candidate;
 - management and supervision of employees, including career progression and staff development;
 - participation in a restructuring, reorganisation, or redundancy exercise;
 - providing input to any type of performance appraisal;
 - providing input to any type of recommendation for salary or reward;
 - making a recommendation or decision in relation to an application or allocation of financial or other resource by budget holders;
 - providing a reference;
 - access to confidential information.

This list is not exhaustive.

- 3.4 Employees who have a personal relationship with another employee are advised to consider carefully whether there is a potential for conflict of interest as they are best placed to assess this. If they are unsure then further advice should be sought, from their line manager in the first instance (or Head of School/Service). Where a potential conflict of interest arises, the person is under a duty to disclose the relationship to their Head of School/Service who can then take a decision (in consultation with the HR Business Partner) on what steps are necessary to manage the potential conflict of interest. Such a disclosure will be treated in confidence and sensitively.
- 3.5 Where any such relationship leads to allegations of coercion, abuse of power or harassment, the University will treat the matter seriously and will investigate and resolve the matter under the relevant policy and procedures. Similarly, the University will not tolerate any employee or student pursuing non-consensual relationships at the University.

4. Relationships between Employees and Students

- 4.1 The University actively values good professional relationships between employees and students that are based on mutual trust and respect. The integrity of the academic relationship between employees and their students is of fundamental importance. In addition, employees involved in teaching, supervision, faculty administration or student support services have a duty of care towards their students.
- 4.2 When working with students, staff should:
- maintain an appropriate physical and emotional distance;
 - perform their University duties in the best interests of the University without favour towards or bias against any individual student;
 - use a University email account, telephone, applications and internet access for electronic communications with students;
 - communicate with students in a professional manner at all times;
 - avoid communicating with students via personal accounts, e.g., personal telephone, email, or social media accounts, and avoid giving their personal mobile phone number to a student or asking students for their personal details;
 - refrain from contacting students outside of normal working hours;
 - refer students with support needs to a relevant University support service, limiting their own role in providing personal support to that for which they are trained and employed;
 - not seek personal information from a student except as relevant to a University process (eg. medical information for mitigating circumstances, or personal circumstances information as part of an academic progress process or appropriate pastoral support);

- where possible, ensure that meetings and discussions occur on campus; and
- follow the same guidelines when participating in events, fieldwork, attending conferences and any other University activities whilst away from University campuses.

4.3 Although the University recognises that human beings do become attracted to and involved with one another without deliberate intent and that such relationships may be desired by both parties and genuinely affectionate, with the exception of excluded relationships, **the University prohibits intimate personal relationships between staff and students** (see definition in appendix A) and considers it as unprofessional for an employee to seek to initiate or pursue a relationship of this kind. Any breaches will be considered as misconduct in line with the 'Staff Disciplinary Procedure'. To be clear, employees must not enter into an intimate personal relationship with any student.

4.4 Employees at the University may have professional responsibilities towards students, eg. in relation to supervision, pastoral care or assessment. Moreover, employees are frequently in a position of authority over students and a relationship may not be an equal one since they involve a significant power imbalance, where there is the potential for an abuse of power to occur. This rests on the fact that some employees set examination papers, grant or deny extensions for pieces of work, award grades, sit on examination boards, write references, etc.

4.5 Failure to meet this requirement of notification will lead to an investigation and potentially formal disciplinary action against the member of staff.

5. Relationships between Employees

5.1 Employees who have a pre-existing relationship that is covered within this policy and have not already disclosed it should inform the most senior member of HR or the University Registrar as soon as possible, who will treat the matter sensitively and confidentially.

5.2 The University requires that, if such consensual relationships arise, they are conducted with the utmost discretion and entirely outside of the professional environment. However, the relationship must be disclosed, as described above.

5.3 Where two employees engage in a consensual relationship and one of them has management responsibilities for the other, this inherently poses a conflict of interest and professionalism. In particular, the University strongly advises against an employee having a consensual relationship with another employee who reports to them directly or indirectly. Where there is evidence that the

relationship has had a serious impact on the University's business then the relevant disciplinary or other appropriate procedure may be used.

- 5.4 Where an employee has a consensual relationship (or past relationship) with a person who reports to them they are under an obligation to inform their Head of School/Service of the existence of this relationship and complete the disclosure form (see Appendix 2). This disclosure will be treated confidentially and sensitively. The employee may find it helpful to discuss the disclosure with their HR Business Partner in the first instance. However, it is the individual's responsibility to make the disclosure.
- 5.5 The Head of School/Service, in consultation with their HR Business Partner, may consider transferring one or both parties, making alternative line management or supervisory arrangements or implementing other appropriate arrangements to eliminate any potential conflict of interest, depending on the circumstances. In very rare circumstances, such alternative arrangements may not be feasible and the University may then have to consider alternative arrangements for one or both parties taking into account the specifics of the situation.
- 5.6 Failure to disclose a consensual relationship in good time may be considered a disciplinary matter and could amount to a breach of trust between the University and the individual employee.

6. Support and Advice

- 6.1 Employees can speak informally with their HR Business Partner or trade union representative for advice and guidance.
- 6.2 Students can speak with Student Services or another employee responsible for their welfare.

7. Reporting and Consequences

- 7.1 Any concerns or violations of this policy should be reported to the designated University authority (eg., Human Resources, University Registrar, or Student Services), as appropriate. The University will take all allegations of misconduct seriously and investigate them in accordance with its safeguarding and / or disciplinary procedures and violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the University's staff and student procedures, which may include suspension, or sanctions (up to dismissal).
- 7.2 Employees found in violation of this policy may also be reported to relevant professional bodies where applicable.
- 7.3 The University will ensure that students who report misconduct are supported and protected from any negative treatment as a result.

- 7.4 In addition to disclosures being recorded centrally by Human Resources, instances that are reported to HR (by either employees or students) of any potential breaches of this policy will be recorded, and may be included in regular reports regarding compliance with the OfS Condition of Registration (Condition E6), in an anonymised manner.

8. Legal and Institutional Compliance

- 8.1 This policy aligns with UK laws and University regulations, including the Equality Act 2010, the Office for Students (OfS) Condition E6 on harassment and sexual misconduct and the University's code of conduct and safeguarding policies.

9. Review and Amendments

- 9.1 This policy shall be reviewed periodically to ensure compliance with the OfS Condition E6, UK legal standards and institutional policies and may be amended as necessary.

10. Other related policies

- [Dignity at Work Policy](#)
- [Staff Disciplinary Policy](#)
- [Grievance Policy](#)

APPENDIX A

Definitions

Consensual Relationship	A consensual relationship refers to any voluntary relationship, either past or present, which is romantic, physically intimate, or sexual in nature, and to which the parties consent or consented.
Intimate Personal Relationship	<p>An intimate personal relationship means a relationship that involves one or more of the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) physical intimacy including isolated or repeated sexual activity; or (ii) romantic or emotional intimacy.
Abuse of Power	<p>This means a situation where a relevant staff member exploits a position of power in relation to a student or staff member so as to apply pressure in a way which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) may result in the student or staff member doing something, or refraining from doing something, that they may not have otherwise done; and (ii) that action or inaction could reasonably result in something that falls within the scope of an intimate personal relationship.
Excluded Relationships	<p>Any ongoing intimate personal relationship that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) existed before the date that this policy comes into force (or when Condition E6 went live, whichever is earlier) and that remains in existence; or (ii) existed before the date that the staff member became a relevant staff member in relation to that student; or (iii) existed before the date that the student became a relevant student in relation to that staff member.

APPENDIX B

Declaration of Consensual Relationship at Work between employees

(In conjunction with the Dignity at Work policy)

<u>Name of employee:</u>	<u>Department:</u> <u>Job title:</u>
<u>Name of other person in the personal relationship:</u>	<u>Department:</u> <u>Job title:</u>
<u>Name of person completing the form:</u>	
<u>Employee signature:</u> <u>Date:</u>	
<u>Other person signature:</u> <u>Date:</u>	

This form should be sent to Human Resources who will store it confidentially on an employees file. Any concerns may be escalated via line management, and potentially to a relevant senior member of the Executive.

For recording next steps:

For conversation between relevant Head of Service / School and the Human Resources Business Partner.

Potential or foreseeable conflicts of interest and actions taken (see section 5.4 and 5.5 of this policy)	
Potential or foreseeable conflicts of interest	Actions taken

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