

STAFF/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN THE UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC CULTURE & QUALITY ASSURANCE WORKSHOP
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Defining the concept

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- University staff/student relationships are primarily professional, focusing on mentorship, guidance, and support, with strict policies against intimate or close personal ties due to power imbalances, potential for exploitation, and conflicts of interest that undermine academic integrity and student welfare.

Defining the concept-2

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- Positive relationships involve respect, clear boundaries, open communication, and addressing student needs maturely, while inappropriate relationships, especially involving power dynamics, are prohibited and can lead to disciplinary action

Professional Boundaries

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- Staff must maintain professionalism, avoiding abusive language and overly intimate personal involvement, acting as guides and mentors

Power Dynamics

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- Acknowledging the inherent power difference is crucial; staff must avoid exploiting this, and relationships become problematic when personal interests conflict with professional duties.

Mentorship vs Intimacy

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- Professional mentorship fosters growth, while intimate relationships create conflicts, potential bias, and undermine trust in the academic system.

Student Welfare

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- The primary goal is to ensure a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment, protecting students from coercion or undue influence

University Policies

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- Most universities have strict policies prohibiting or heavily regulating intimate relationships, requiring declaration and action to manage conflicts, especially for staff in direct supervisory roles

Professional staff/ student Relationship

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- **Supportive Mentorship:** Offering academic and psychosocial support, clear expectations, and fostering personal growth.
- **Respectful Communication:** Using dignified language, being approachable, and handling student emotions wisely.
- **Clear Expectations:** Setting and meeting professional standards in teaching, such as timely responses and reliable attendance.

Unprofessional staff/ student Relationship

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- **Intimate/Sexual Relationships:** Especially those involving power imbalances, often leading to exploitation or perceptions of bias.
- **Coercion & Manipulation:** Using authority to pressure students for personal gain or intimacy.
- **Failure to Declare:** Not reporting existing or developing intimate relationships that create conflicts of interest.

Professional relationship boundaries

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- **Core Qualities:** Mutual respect, trust, and effective communication are foundational elements.
- **Standards of Conduct:** Staff are expected to be fair in assessments, avoid intimidation or bullying, and be sensitive in scheduling appointments.
- **Mentorship:** Staff often act as guides or mentors, helping students discover their potential and protecting them from "wrong hands".
- **Communication Channels:** Professional boundaries typically require using official university channels (e.g., university email, Microsoft Teams) and avoiding personal direct messaging or social media for academic purposes.

Intimate and personal Relationships

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- **Prohibitions:** Intimate relationships are strictly prohibited between a "relevant staff member" (someone with direct teaching, supervisory, or administrative responsibility) and a student.
- **Mandatory Disclosure:** If a personal relationship (family, financial, or intimate) exists or develops, it **must** be declared to university management. Failure to disclose is often grounds for disciplinary action, including dismissal.
- **Management Plans:** Upon disclosure, universities typically implement a management plan to remove any direct conflict of interest, such as reassigning teaching, supervision, or assessment duties.

Risk and Safeguarding

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- **Power Imbalance:** Policies recognize that the inherent power dynamic in universities can compromise the nature of consent, even in seemingly consensual relationships.
- **Minors and Vulnerable Adults:** Any intimate relationship with a student under 18 or an "adult at risk" is strictly prohibited and may fall under criminal statutes like the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- **Third-Party Impact:** Personal relationships are noted to affect the wider university community, potentially leading to perceptions of favoritism or bias that undermine trust in the academic process.

Questions or Comments

