

Close Personal Relationships Policy

Table of Contents

1. Purpose
 2. Scope
 3. Definitions
 4. Policy statement
 - 4.1. University's expectations
 - 4.2. Staff/staff relationships
 - 4.3. Staff/student relationships
 - 4.4. Reporting by a student
 - 4.5. Other policies
 - 4.6. Breaches of this policy
 5. Responsibilities
 6. Related policies
- Schedule 1 – Guidelines to avoid sexual or romantic relationships between staff and students
 Schedule 2 – Examples of exploitative or predatory conduct

1. Purpose

- a. Close personal relationships which exist or arise in the course of University activities and work can involve or create an actual, potential or perceived imbalance of power or influence or conflicts of interest between the parties. This may make it difficult to maintain the boundaries of professional and personal life and can cause serious difficulties and disruption in the work or study environment for colleagues and students.
- b. In particular, academic staff are trusted to teach, guide and supervise students and are in a position of trust and power relative to the student. This position of trust and power raises serious questions about capacity for consent and academic integrity in any sexual or romantic relationship between academic staff and their students.
- c. In line with its [Values](#) and [Code of Conduct](#), the University is committed to fostering a safe and healthy environment for work and study. This policy sets out the expectations of Flinders and the obligations of staff in relation to close personal relationships between staff and staff and between staff and students.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff, as defined below.

3. Definitions

conflict of interest

circumstances where an individual's personal or professional interests or relationships affect or could potentially affect or be reasonably perceived to affect their ability to fulfil their duties and responsibilities to the University honestly, impartially and without any improper influence.

See the [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) for further detail.

close personal relationship	includes relatives, relationships by marriage or law (e.g. de facto relationships, former partners, adopted and stepchildren) and relationships beyond the bounds of mere friendship or a professional relationship (e.g. romantic or sexual relationships) and relationships involving financial dependence or support.
staff	For the purposes of this policy, staff includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employees • exchange staff and visiting academics • employees of controlled entities and affiliated clubs and associations who are under the direction or control of the University • other individuals who perform paid or unpaid work on behalf of the University (e.g. contractors, consultant, persons with academic status, volunteers) • members of Council and its sub-committees.

4. Policy statement

4.1. University's expectations

Flinders is committed to fostering a safe and healthy environment for work and study. Due to the actual, potential or perceived imbalance of power or influence or conflicts of interest which can arise in close personal relationships in the work and study environment, and in particular, having regard to the relative position of trust and power between staff and students, Flinders:

- i. requires all close personal relationships with any staff member or student which may create an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest to be declared and managed in accordance with the [Conflict of Interest Policy](#)
- ii. requires staff to not participate in any decision-making process or activity with regard to another member of staff or student with whom they are, or have been, in a close personal relationship
- iii. strongly discourages all romantic or sexual relationships between staff and students, and
- iv. requires staff to take active steps to avoid any romantic or sexual relationship with students with whom they are teaching, supervising or otherwise engaged in an academic manner.

4.2. Staff/staff relationships

Staff must:

- a. not engage in any exploitative or predatory conduct or otherwise take advantage of any imbalance of power or influence in their relationships with other staff (for guidance, see examples at Schedule 2)
- b. declare and manage in accordance with the [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) all close personal relationships with any other staff member which may create an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest
- c. not participate in any decision-making process or activity with regard to another member of staff with whom they are, or have been, in a close personal relationship, including the following:
 - i. employment recruitment
 - ii. decision-making processes regarding conditions of employment e.g. salary and allowances
 - iii. decision-making processes regarding performance management, professional development and promotion
 - iv. selection for any award or other form of recognition
 - v. decision-making processes regarding academic status
 - vi. grievance processes, misconduct or disciplinary matters.

4.3. Staff/student relationships

Staff must:

- a. not engage in a sexual relationship with a student (or any other person) under 18 years of age under any circumstances
- b. not engage in any exploitative or predatory conduct or otherwise take advantage of the imbalance of power or influence in their relationships with students (for guidance, see examples at Schedule 2)
- c. declare and manage in accordance with the [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) all close personal relationships with any student which may create an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest
- d. take active steps to avoid any romantic or sexual relationship with students with whom they are teaching, supervising or otherwise engaged in an academic manner (for guidance, see Schedule 1)
- e. not participate in any decision-making process or activity with regard to a student with whom they are, or have been, in a close personal relationship, including the following:
 - i. selection for any undergraduate or postgraduate course offered by the University
 - ii. assessment
 - iii. selection for any scholarship or prize
 - iv. honours supervision
 - v. supervision of a graduate student
 - vi. decision-making processes regarding academic progress and preclusion
 - vii. complaints procedures, appeals, and disciplinary matters.

4.4. Reporting by a student

Students who are or have been in a close personal relationship with a member of staff may make known the relationship to the College Dean (People and Resources) or the Vice-President and Executive Dean and request that the relationship be declared as an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest in accordance with the [Conflict of Interest Policy](#), on their behalf.

4.5. Other policies

This policy is to be read alongside the University's other policies and procedures. The requirements of this policy are in addition to and do not detract from the requirements of those other policies and procedures, including the [Code of Conduct](#), [Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Policy](#) and [Bullying Prevention and Management Policy](#).

4.6. Breaches of this policy

Failure to comply with this policy may amount to misconduct and disciplinary action may apply, up to and including termination of employment.

5. Responsibilities

All staff

- a. Declare and manage in accordance with the [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) all close personal relationships with any staff member or student which may create an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest.
- b. Not participate in any decision-making process or activity with regard to another member of staff or student with whom they are, or have been, in a close personal relationship.
- c. Take active steps to avoid any romantic or sexual relationship with students, whom they are teaching, supervising or otherwise engaged in an academic manner.

	d. Not engage in any exploitative or predatory conduct or otherwise take advantage of any imbalance of power or influence in their relationships with other staff or students.
Manager / supervisor	e. Publicise the requirements of this policy among all staff. f. Advise staff on declaring close personal relationships which may create an actual potential or perceived conflict of interest. g. Review all declarations of close personal relationships and (if applicable) develop in conjunction with the relevant staff member a suitable mitigation or management strategy to address the conflict of interest.
College Dean (People and Resources) / Vice-President and Executive Dean	h. Declare and manage any conflict of interest arising from a close personal relationship reported by a student in accordance with this policy and the Conflict of Interest Policy .

6. Related policies

[Conflict of Interest Policy](#)

See also:

[Code of Conduct](#)

[Bullying Prevention and Management Policy](#)

[Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Policy](#)

[HDR Supervisor Policy](#)

[Charter for HDR Student and Supervisor Responsibilities](#)

Approval Authority	Vice-President (Corporate Services)
Responsible Officer	Director, People and Culture
Approval Date	22 September 2021
Effective Date	22 September 2021
Review Date*	September 2024
Last amended	
CM file number	CF21/512

* Unless otherwise indicated, this procedure will still apply beyond the review date.

Printed versions of this document are not controlled. Please refer to the Flinders Policy Library for the latest version.

Schedule 1 – Guidelines to avoid sexual or romantic relationships between staff and students

The following are guidelines to assist staff to avoid any sexual or romantic relationship arising with their students. They are guidelines only and should be applied with the context and overall purpose in mind. For example, it may be appropriate to supply students with your private mobile number if that is your main mode of contact and it is only for the purpose of making contact about academic / University matters.

To avoid any sexual or romantic relationship arising with their students, staff should:

- take steps to maintain an appropriate physical and emotional distance from students
- only use University email accounts and telephone and internet access for communications with students, avoiding use of social media sites (such as Facebook or Twitter) and internet chat sites
- not share personal contact details such as home address, private telephone number and email address
- where possible, ensure that meetings and discussions about University matters occur on University campuses. Where not possible, ensure meetings occur in a public venue, such as a library or café
- refer students with support needs to a relevant University support service and limit their role in providing personal support to a student where this is not part of their employment duties
- refrain from contacting students after hours about University matters
- avoid touching/squeezing/hugging or otherwise making physical contact with students
- not seek intimate personal information from a student except as relevant to a University process (e.g. medical information for special consideration, or personal circumstances information as part of an academic progress process)
- not have one-on-one meetings at a private residence or secluded place
- not stay at a student's house overnight
- not accept a gift from a student, unless it is not more than a minor token of thanks and only after all assessment has been completed
- not borrow or accept money, or have any financial interest with a student
- not accept personal favours from a student e.g. shopping or babysitting
- not discuss intimate and sensitive personal matters with a student, such as sexual or intimate relationships, small talk of a sexual or romantic nature, or other personal issues
- apply the above guidelines when participating in fieldwork, conferences and other University activities away from the usual workplace or study environment.

Schedule 2 – Examples of exploitative or predatory conduct

Exploitative or predatory conduct involves the misuse of power to gain a personal advantage or make someone do something which they would not otherwise want to do. It is prohibited and a breach of this policy.

Some examples of such conduct include:

- a staff member indicating to a student that their marks will improve if they begin a sexual or romantic relationship with them
- an academic staff member asking a student to baby sit, look after their house, undertake administrative duties or any other favours other than on normal arm's length terms
- a tutor repeatedly asking a student out for coffee or dinner or over to their private residence
- similar conduct as described above between a senior staff member and a more junior staff member.