

Personal Relationships at Work Policy

Effective June 2022

This policy applies to:

All colleagues and for the purposes of this policy, this includes honorary colleagues, emeritus colleagues, PGR Students who teach, joint appointees and workers

The policy sets out the expectations and obligations of Newcastle University colleagues with respect to personal relationships with students, and between colleagues, regardless of sexual orientation and identity.

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1. Introduction

All colleagues, postgraduate teaching assistants, and student mentors are in a position of trust and it is important that they conduct themselves with sound professional judgement, impartiality, and integrity. We therefore always require due consideration to what is an appropriate environment and what is appropriate conduct in relation to the activities they are undertaking.

We recognise and accept socialising on a friendship basis as it is often a positive aspect of being an active member of the University community. However, the nature of colleague/student and colleague/colleague relationships imposes particular responsibilities and duties on colleagues. We want to limit circumstances where a position of power may be abused or perceived to be abused, and protect students and colleagues from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

There will be particular circumstances where the colleague concerned will need to withdraw from certain decisions or from undertaking certain roles, in order to ensure that students and colleagues are appropriately and proportionately safeguarded from harm; and to protect themselves and the University from any possible criticism of unfair treatment or bias.

Our University community is diverse, with colleagues and students from a range of cultural backgrounds. Whilst this policy reflects legislation and societal expectations around behaviour in the UK context, we are conscious that many students and colleagues will have had different lived experiences which inform their approaches to personal relationships in the workplace or education setting. We aim to take an educative approach, ensuring that students and colleagues are fully informed of their rights and obligations under this policy, so that they can make fully informed decisions about their personal relationships. Students and colleagues will always be treated in line with our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion values.

We will not tolerate unduly favourable treatment of a colleague or student with whom a colleague has a close personal or intimate relationship, similarly, we will not accept any harassment, victimisation or less favourable

treatment of any colleague or student with whom the individual has or had a close personal or intimate relationship.

Our aim is to ensure a positive, supportive working and educational environment where all are treated fairly. All declarations will be treated respectfully, sensitively and confidentially, and the wishes of both parties respected as far as is possible.

2. Relationships with Under 18's or Vulnerable Adults

Colleagues must not be in, or enter into, a close personal or intimate relationship with a student or colleague under the age of 18, or an [adult known or suspected to be at risk or vulnerable](#).

The definition of vulnerable adults includes anyone with a condition or disability (including neurodiversity, long or short-term health conditions, mental illnesses or substance addition) if that condition significantly reduces their ability to give informed active consent to the relationship. This could be a lack of capacity to understand and assess the relationship (vulnerability to grooming) or because the impairment changes the balance of power (vulnerability to manipulation, coercion or bullying).

Whilst a young person can consent to sexual activity once they reach the age of 16, the Sexual Offences Act (2003) makes it a criminal offence for a person to engage in sexual activity of any kind with a person under the age of 18, where the adult is in a position of trust.

Anyone suspecting a colleague of acting inappropriately towards a student or colleague under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult should contact the [Designated Safeguarding Officer](#), who may contact the local authority designated officer and/or the police.

3. Relationships with Students

We acknowledge the professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of our students, and that all relationships with them must feature trust, confidence and equal treatment. We therefore **do not accept** close personal or intimate relationships between colleagues and students where there is direct supervision. This includes assessment, selection, teaching, tutoring, mental health or wellbeing support, advisors or guidance work, or pastoral care. A close personal relationship means a regular and ongoing relationship that is romantic, familial, financial, or where there is a significant personal bond. For example, a relative, partner, close family friend, close friend, or a relationship where there is financial dependence. An intimate relationship means any association, however brief, of a sexual or other intimate nature (including intimate relationships where there is no sexual intimacy), either in person or remotely (for example via social media, email or text messaging).

If you find yourself in this situation, we require you to disclose this to your line manager or local people services team using the form provided in appendix 2. They will consider alternative arrangements to reduce or eliminate the potential conflicts of interest arising. Alternative arrangements may include not having sole responsibility for aspects of the student's work that require judgement and not being solely in a position to take decisions affecting the student (e.g. marking; the provision or withholding of facilities for research; supervising a PhD student; the allocation of places on courses; bursaries or scholarships).

All colleagues are in a position of authority over students, creating an imbalance of power, and we therefore **strongly advise** you avoid initiating or developing a close personal relationship with a student even when there is no direct supervision. Doing so could still compromise the professional relationship making active consent difficult or impossible to obtain, and we require you to discuss this with your line manager.

Active consent means that both parties must have the capacity to agree to a relationship or physical intimacy freely, and without fear of negative consequences. For active consent to be present, both parties must be able to withdraw from a relationship or physical intimacy at any time, without fear of negative consequences. Active consent can, therefore, be difficult or impossible to attain where there is an imbalance of power because the party who holds less power has less capacity to withdraw freely.

This policy applies to close personal or intimate relationships, which are formed after the implementation date of this policy. Any existing or previous relationships are referred to in Section 5.

4. Relationships between Colleagues

We recognise that, as colleagues, we are likely to form mutually rewarding working relationships and personal friendships. We also recognise that some relationships in the workplace contain the potential for a conflict of interest or an imbalance of power. This can be a stressful time for colleagues, especially if they feel that they cannot discuss these issues with their line manager. This can also lead to a challenge to our actions or behaviours on the grounds of fairness and equity, which may have a negative impact on our own reputation and that of the University.

Therefore, we require an open and honest dialogue if you have any family, friendship, close personal or intimate relationships (past or present) that may influence, or be perceived to influence, your ability to carry out your role. A close personal relationship means a regular and ongoing relationship that is romantic, familial, financial or where there is a significant personal bond. For example, a relative, partner, close family friend, close friend, or a relationship where there is financial dependence. An intimate relationship means any association, however brief, of a sexual or other intimate nature, either in person or remotely (for example via social media, email or text messaging).

Where necessary, please disclose this to your line manager or local people services team using the form provided in appendix 2. They will consider alternative arrangements to reduce or eliminate the potential for conflicts of interests arising. Alternative arrangements may include not being involved in formal activities or processes concerning the other party, such as recruitment, PDR, promotion or authorising expenditure. A change of team or department for either of the parties may also be considered. Disciplinary action may be taken against colleagues where there is a failure to declare this information and it has found to have created a conflict of interest.

We do not require you to discuss any relationship with another colleague where there is no influence or perceived influence on your ability to do your role. For example, colleagues that work in different faculties or service areas. If you have any doubts, please speak to your line manager or local people services team. You will not be penalised for seeking information and guidance, and your line manager or local people service team will work with you to resolve any concerns.

5. Existing or previous relationships

This section applies to relationships, which are in existence at the time this policy is published, and to relationships, which have occurred within the past two years of the policy being published.

Where a personal or close relationship with a student already exists prior to either party joining Newcastle University, the colleague should inform their line manager, as soon as possible. We understand that pre-existing relationships with someone who later decides to become a Newcastle University student/colleague happens.

Where a personal or close relationship with a colleague that may influence, or be perceived to influence, your ability to carry out your role exists prior to either party joining Newcastle University, you should inform your line manager as soon as possible.

[To be deleted 6 months after policy launches

Colleagues must, within 6 months of this policy being published, declare any existing and/or previous (within the past two years) close personal or intimate relationships with a current student where there is or has been direct supervision.

Colleagues must, within 6 months of this policy being published, declare any existing and/or previous (within the past two years) friendships, family members, close personal or intimate relationships (past or present) that may influence, or be perceived to influence, the ability to carry out your role.]

6. Breach of policy

A **new** close personal or intimate relationship between a colleague and student where there is direct supervision is a breach of this policy and will be investigated under the disciplinary policy.

It is not a breach of policy where the relationship already exists prior to the colleague directly supervising the student, e.g. the student changes courses or the relationship started before the student joined Newcastle University. However, we do expect you to declare this to your line manager or people services colleague to ensure alternative arrangements can be considered.

Where the colleague **has not** declared a relationship with a student where there is direct supervision, and either the student, another colleague or a third party reports it, it will be investigated under the disciplinary procedure.

Failure to disclose a close personal or intimate relationship with a colleague that may influence, or be perceived to influence, your ability to do your role, may be investigated under the disciplinary policy.

Malicious Reports

Where it is felt that any colleague or student reports a relationship vexatiously, they may be investigated under the relevant disciplinary policy.

7. Related Policies

[Disciplinary Policy](#)

[Student Disciplinary Policy](#)

[Post Graduate Code of Practice](#)

8. Policy Agreement

This policy has been approved following consultation with all campus trade unions. It is not part of the formal terms and conditions of employment and we may review and amend the policy from time to time.

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Document Control Information | |
| Does this replace another policy? Yes, it replaces the Personal Relationships Code of Conduct | |
| Approval | |
| Approved by: People Matters Group | Date: April 2022 |
| Effective from: June 2022 | |
| Review date: June 2025 | |
| Responsibilities | |
| Executive Sponsor: Adrienne McFarland, Chief Operating Officer | |

| | | |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| Policy Owner: Kate Smith, People Relations and Policy Manager | | |
| Person(s) responsible for compliance: | | |
| Consultation | | |
| Version | Body consulted | Date |
| Initial consultation | Student Health & Wellbeing Faculty Director of ED&I (HaSS) | 13.5.21 10.5.21 |
| Draft 1 | People Services | November 2021 |
| Draft 2 | Trade Union JNC | January 2022 |
| Draft 3 | Faculty Exec Board / Senior Officers Group (SOG) | February and March 2022 |
| Draft 5 | Colleague Network Chairs | March 2022 |
| Draft 5 | Dean of EDI | March 2022 |
| Draft 5 | PGR Sub Committee | April 2022 |
| Draft 5 | It Happens Here Student Society and NUSU | April 2022 |
| Draft 6 | Trade Union JNC | April 2022 |
| Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Analysis: | | |
| Does the policy have the potential to impact on people in a different way because of their protected characteristics? | | |
| Initial assessment by: Kate Smith | | Date: 4.10.2021 |
| Key changes as a result of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Analysis: | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prohibiting close personal relationships where there is direct supervision with a student - Introduce a declaration form to better record and report cases to review data regularly | | |
| Document location | | |
| https://newcastle.sharepoint.com/docs/HR%20Policies/Forms/Policies.aspx | | |

Appendix 1: Definitions

Abuse of power: Abuse of power is where someone uses their position of power or authority in an unacceptable manner. Abuse of power can take various forms and may include, but is not limited to, grooming, manipulation, coercion, putting pressure on others to engage in conduct they do not feel comfortable with.

Adult at risk / Vulnerable Adult: An adult at risk is someone over the age of 18 who receives or may need community care services by reason of disability or illness and as a result of those needs is unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation. This can relate to physical, mental or psychological wellbeing or the potential to be drawn into sexual or criminal exploitation and activity. The definition of vulnerable adults includes anyone with a condition or disability (including neurodiversity, long or short-term health conditions, mental illnesses or substance addition) if that condition significantly reduces their ability to give informed active consent to the relationship. This could be a lack of capacity to understand and assess the relationship (vulnerability to grooming) or because the impairment changes the balance of power (vulnerability to manipulation, coercion or bullying).

Associated supervision: where the colleague has some form of authority over the student but not directly supervising them. This could include having direct supervision with someone close to them, including a family member, a close friend or being more senior in authority in the same Faculty to the student's direct supervisor.

Close Friend: This is someone who you know well, spend time with socially, and have a loyalty to.

Close personal relationships: A close personal relationship means a regular and ongoing relationship that is romantic, familial, financial, or where there is a significant personal bond. For example, a relative, partner, close family friend, close friend, or a relationship where there is financial dependence.

Consent: Consent is agreeing by choice and having the freedom and capacity to make that choice. The person seeking consent should always take steps to ensure that consent is freely given, that it is informed and recognises that it can be withdrawn at any time.

Direct Supervision: This includes assessment, selection, teaching, tutoring, mental health or wellbeing support, advisors or guidance work, or pastoral care.

Family friend: a person who has relations with your family.

Freedom to consent: a person is free to make a choice if nothing negative would happen to them if they said no. For example, a person is not free to choose if:

- they are being threatened with violence (by the perpetrator and/or by someone else)
- they are being threatened with humiliation
- they believe that the continuation or assessment of their studies, or progression or advancement of their career, will be at risk, if they refused
- they are being blackmailed
- there is a significant power imbalance and the party without power feels pressured to continue in the relationship against their will.

Capacity to consent: Capacity is about whether someone is physically and/or mentally able to make a choice and to understand the consequences of that choice. For example, a person does not have the capacity to give consent if they are asleep or unconscious. A person's capacity to consent may be inhibited by the influence of drugs or alcohol or the presence of a cognitive or learning difficulty, or mental health condition.

Grooming: Grooming can be defined as a gradual process that someone in a position of power uses to manipulate someone to do things they may not be comfortable with and to make them less likely to reject or report abusive behaviour. Grooming will initially start as befriending someone and making them feel special and may result in sexual abuse and/or exploitation.

Influence or Perceived Influence: Influence is defined as being able to affect a person or its the power that someone has over someone. Examples where influence could occur or be perceived to occur include:

- being more senior in grade
- being on an open contract rather than a precarious contract of employment
- being part of a recruitment process
- assessing an individual's performance and carrying out a PDR
- input into a promotion or pay review
- line managing day to day duties and responsibilities
- authorising expenditure
- offering opportunities for development

This list is not exhaustive.

Intimate relationships: An intimate relationship means any association, however brief, of a sexual or other intimate nature, either in person or remotely (for example via social media, email or text messaging).

Position of Trust: Any colleague working closely with children, young people or adults at risk, is in a position of trust.

Spouse/Civil Partner: The person you are legally married to or the legally recognised union with rights similar to those of marriage

Appendix 2: Personal Relationships at Work Declaration Form

As the declaration contains sensitive personal data, it will be stored securely and managed in compliance with data protection legislation. Such declarations will be treated respectfully, sensitively and confidentially, and the wishes of both parties respected as far as is possible.

SECTION A: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE COLLEAGUE

Please complete this form and send it securely via email to your Line Manager who will discuss the form with you if necessary.

Date:

| | |
|---|--|
| Your Details | |
| Name | |
| Line Manager | |
| Job Title | |
| Faculty/Service and School/Dept. | |
| Other party's details | |
| Name | |
| Are they a student or a colleague? | |
| Job Title (if colleague) | |
| Faculty/Service and School/Dept. | |
| Nature of Relationship: <i>(Please state whether the relationship is of a close personal nature, for example a close friend or relative, or an intimate/romantic relationship).</i> | |
| Relationship of close personal nature (if relevant) for example cousin, mother, friend etc. | |
| When did the close personal/intimate relationship start (if relevant) (approximate month/year)? | |
| <p>I understand the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It may be necessary for permanent or temporary adjustments to be made to any supervisory arrangements or other conditions, to remove any real or perceived conflict of interest arising from the relationship. 2. This information will be stored securely and managed in compliance with data protection legislation. 3. I have read and understood the Personal Relationships at Work policy <p>Signed:</p> <p>Print Name:</p> <p>Date:</p> | |

SECTION B: TO BE COMPLETED BY LINE MANAGER WITH THE COLLEAGUE IF NECESSARY

Please only answer the questions below. There is no requirement to ask any further details of the relationship, for example, where they met or why the relationship started.

Name:

Job Title:

Date:

| | |
|---|-----|
| Has this relationship been declared within six months of the new policy launching / within one month of the relationship starting? | Y/N |
| If no, why not? | |
| Are adjustments or alternative arrangements required to the colleague's role? | Y/N |
| Reasons for adjustments | |
| Details of action | |

Declaration form to be placed on colleague's SAP file.
Please contact your local People Services team to upload this on your behalf.

Appendix 3: FAQS

I have been employed for several years and I am married to another colleague. My line manager is aware of this, do I need to complete a disclosure form?

We only need to know this information if your spouse/civil partner may influence, or be perceived to influence, your ability to carry out your role. If that's the case, whilst your current line manager is aware and your relationship may be common knowledge to those who have worked with you for a while, if you or your line manager change roles, it is important this information is passed to your new line manager. Therefore, please complete a form to be placed on your SAP file.

I am an Academic colleague and my partner wishes to enrol as a student within my Faculty. Is that allowed?

Yes. As a faculty colleague, you could not directly supervise, assess, select, teach, tutor or provide pastoral care for your partner, but as long as we know about it, we can make arrangements so that neither of you are in this position. Please talk to your line manager about this situation.

We understand that pre-existing relationships with someone who later decides to become a Newcastle University student happens. The aim of this policy is to prohibit initiating a new close personal relationship with a current student.

I am an assessor on a course and I have a partner who is enrolled on the course. What should I do?

You must disclose the relationship to your line manager who will need to inform the appropriate manager responsible for the course. Alternative arrangements will be put in place so that you do not participate in any evaluation of your partner. If the course involves multiple assessors, then it is usually easy to adjust your role in the course so that this is possible.

I am a postgraduate student who works in a faculty member's lab with somewhat informal academic authority over other students who work in the lab. What should I do if my partner is among those students?

If a student or postgraduate student is the individual in a position of authority (for example because of a teaching, laboratory, or other supervisory role over a student), then timely disclosure should be made to an appropriate manager.

The colleague or PGR student (the individual in a position of authority) is responsible for disclosure, and you should inform the student that you are making the disclosure. The purpose of this is for alternative arrangements to be put in place that protects you both, other students and also protects the University.

I am a faculty colleague and my partner is a student in a degree program with which I have no academic connection. Is it necessary for me to disclose the relationship?

We require that you inform your line manager to ensure we take appropriate action if necessary. It is unlikely that any immediate alternative arrangements are needed, but transparency is critical to ensure we can act and protect all parties should we need to.

I am a lecturer, and my partner is a student in a degree programme with which I have no academic connect, however their brother is. Is it necessary for me to disclose the relationship?

We require that you inform your line manager to ensure we take appropriate action if necessary. Whilst there may be no direct supervision with your partner, there is a direct association with a relative of theirs and therefore it is extremely important to disclose the relationships so we can act and protect all parties should we feel the need to.

I am not involved in a consensual relationship but am concerned about a consensual relationship between other individuals. What are my options to address my concerns under this policy?

If you are concerned about a consensual relationship between other individuals, you may report the relationship by informing your line manager if you are a colleague or your supervisor if you are a student. You

could use the [anonymous reporting form](#) however, we will not ask you for any personally identifiable details and we will not be able to offer direct support and/or commence any formal complaint processes. If you have safeguarding concerns, as one of the individuals is under 18 or a vulnerable adult, please contact a [Designated Safeguarding Officer](#).

If a student discloses a relationship but the colleague has not, when will the colleague involved be informed and what will happen?

The colleague has a right to know that a disclosure concerning them has been made. If they are surprised to learn that the student considers them to be in a romantic or sexual relationship, this information is important for the colleague to know. If the colleague has failed to inform the University of this relationship, they may be subject to disciplinary action.

Communication between the appropriate manager and all parties is essential to ensure alternative arrangements can be considered to manage any potential or perceived conflict of interest or abuse of power. If the student is concerned about disclosing, they can contact [Student Health & Wellbeing](#).

Upon disclosure, will my manager ask about my private romantic or sexual relationship?

We will only ask about such aspects of the situation that are necessary to consider alternative arrangements. We will not pursue intimate details of the relationship: its existence and the circumstances of the workplace are sufficient.

Won't disclosure endanger some individuals, especially LGBTQ+ students/colleagues who may not be public about their sexuality?

We recognise that, in certain cases, disclosure could be concerning. Where the wellbeing of a student or a colleague is exposed, there is a provision for disclosure to be made only to the [Student Health & wellbeing team](#) (for students) and to [People Services](#) (for colleagues) who will oversee and manage alternative arrangements discreetly and sensitively.

I am a PHD supervisor and I am in a relationship with my post-graduate student. What will happen in this situation?

As stated in the [Code of Practice](#): *all members of staff are required to declare any personal relationships with any student they are asked to supervise or are already supervising. A supervisor who declares such a personal relationship prior to appointment as supervisor for the student in question shall not be permitted to undertake supervision of that student. A supervisor who declares such a relationship after having been appointed as a member of the supervisory team for the student in question, subject to the permission of the Dean of Postgraduate Studies, may continue, but shall not be responsible for, or be involved in, any reports affecting the student's progress and/or assessment.*

I am an academic colleague and my niece is studying one of the modules I teach on. I teach her once a week in a lecture hall with another 150+ students, do I need to disclose this?

We require that you inform your line manager to ensure we take appropriate action if necessary. It is unlikely that any immediate alternative arrangements are needed, but transparency is critical to ensure we can act and protect all parties should we need to.

I am in a very new relationship/extra marital relationship with another colleague and have concerns over disclosing this to my line manager. Can I wait until the relationship progresses before I tell anyone?

We understand that disclosing your relationship may feel too soon or uncomfortable. No one is here to judge you or have an opinion about the relationship. However, we do ask you to tell when the relationship, regardless of the length of the relationship, has the potential for a conflict of interest or an imbalance of power. You can do this via [People Services](#) rather than your line manager if you would feel more comfortable and they will oversee and manage alternative arrangements discreetly and sensitively.