



## Professional Personal Relationships Policy

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 City, University of London (“City”) values good professional relationships between staff and students and recognises these relationships are an important part of student development and pastoral care.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to set requirements and to provide guidance to all University staff regarding personal relationships, in order to avoid any real or perceived conflicts of interest, or misuse of power and authority.
- 1.3 The policy also covers former personal relationships if there is still the potential for a conflict of interest to arise and or where there is a potential imbalance of power/authority/influence.
- 1.4 The purpose of the policy is to;
  - Set requirements and expectations for personal relationships between members of City’s community;
  - Safeguard professional relationships in areas where personal relationships overlap with working relationships;
  - Protect members of City’s community from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest; and
  - Support City in exercising its duty of care to protect staff and students from inappropriate behaviour which may include abuse of power and trust; controlling, coercive or predatory behaviour; sexual harassment; violence.

1.5 Examples of personal relationships include:

- Family relationships – including civil or other enduring partnership, spouses and children or relatives;
- Business/ commercial/ financial relationships;
- Intimate relationships – including all sexual or romantic contact, whether in person and/or online or via means of other electronic or written communication, one-off or longer-term; or
- Close friendships – this covers personal relationships which extend beyond usual work, study or extracurricular/leisure activities through which individuals may be acquainted. It therefore involves close friendships where individuals are well-acquainted, and engage frequently in activities together which are unrelated to work or study.

1.6 The policy is aligned with City's [Disciplinary](#) and [Dismissal](#) Procedures and [Staff Harassment & Dignity at Work Guidelines](#) and the [Student Discipline Regulation](#), the [Student Sexual Misconduct Policy for students](#) and the [Student Harassment and Bullying Policy](#).

## 2. Equality and Diversity Statement

City, University of London is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in all its activities, processes, and culture, under its Public Sector Equality Duties and the Equality Act 2010. This includes promoting equality and diversity for all, irrespective of any protected characteristic, working pattern, family circumstance, socio-economic background, political belief or other irrelevant distinction. Where relevant to the policy, decision making panels will ensure a reasonable gender balance (with at least one man and one women) and will actively consider representation of other protected groups.

## 3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all members of City's community and covers areas for which personal relationships raise concerns about conflict of interest, trust, inappropriate conduct and/or confidentiality which may occur at the outset, during, or on the ending of a relationship. The policy also covers former personal relationships.

3.2 The term staff is used broadly and refers to any individual either employed or engaged by the University to carry out work for the University. It includes postgraduates or doctoral researchers carrying out teaching or other activities. A student is any individual studying on any course of study at the University, including short courses.

3.3 The term third party includes clients, customers, contractors or suppliers.

## 4. Professional Conduct in Relationships

4.1 All members of City's community have an obligation to act with professionalism, integrity and respect towards one another in all relationships.

4.2 All staff, and where applicable, students are reminded of the obligation to:

- Conduct themselves in a way that is consistent with their role and City's policies; including those relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Harassment and Financial Regulations;
- Recognise that they are in a position of trust, when dealing with students in any capacity, and that there is a professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students. This includes accepting the constraints and obligations that are inherent in that responsibility;
- Behave in a professional and respectful way and maintain appropriate professional and clear boundaries between professional and personal matters;
- Not behave in a way that could lead to complaints of unacceptable behaviour<sup>1</sup>; including harassment<sup>2</sup> or a conflict of interest, even where such an outcome was not intended;
- Not abuse any power differential or put themselves in a position where it could be perceived that power is being abused; and
- Report any concerns arising from the existence of a current or former relationship where it is observed that a relationship might involve coercion, predatory behaviour or constitute an abuse of power or actual or perceived conflict of interest.

4.3 All Reported concerns will be managed as confidentially and as sensitively as possible under the circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> Such behaviour might include but will not be limited to coercion, predatory behaviour or an abuse of power. See Appendix B also.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B

## 5. Conflict of Interest

5.1 A conflict of interest may arise in any situation where a member of staff's personal interests, or interest they owe to another body, may (or be perceived to) influence or affect the member of staff's decision making, or improperly influence the performance of their duties and responsibilities.

5.2 A conflict of interest will often occur where a personal relationship exists between members of staff where there is a direct or indirect supervisory or line management relationship.

5.3 Close personal relationships between members of staff where there is not a management connection, but where the nature of the roles undertaken results in close working relationships, may also present a conflict of interest.

5.4 While it is not possible to define all the different types of relationship or sets of circumstance where a conflict of interest could arise, examples may include:

- Decisions relating to financial matters;
- Decisions relating to recruitment, salary, terms and conditions of service, management, promotion, allocation of duties etc;
- Situations where a manager has a sexual, intimate or familial relationship with a person who reports to them either directly or indirectly, or with a student;
- Situations where staff are required to work in the same team, on committees or in other groups (this could be at any level in the University, including interdisciplinary teams); and
- Decisions involving academic assessment and supervision.

5.5 Staff are required to disclose any type of personal relationship with a student, or any type of personal relationship with another member of staff which could constitute an actual conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest (see Clause 6).

This will allow appropriate management of the situation and to avoid any actual or potential conflict of interest and to protect both the individual parties, and City from any possible criticism of bias.

5.6 Staff should be aware that a failure to declare a personal relationship which creates a conflict of interest may result in disciplinary action.

## 6. Reporting Personal Relationships

### 6.1 Relationships between staff and students

- All personal relationships (intimate, close friendships or family) must be disclosed by the member of staff involved to the relevant Head of Department/Manager.
- Heads of Department/Managers will be required to take action, as is reasonably practical, to protect the interests of all parties. This will include making the relevant Dean, or Chief Operating Officer, or Professional Service Director aware of the relationship and agreeing any actions that should be taken.
- Intimate relationships between staff and students are prohibited where the staff member has responsibility for the student in the areas of teaching/learning, assessment, selection, pastoral care or research. Where an intimate personal relationship is declared, it will be necessary for steps to be taken to remove any actual or potential conflict of interest. Intimate relationships between staff and students who are under the age of 18 are prohibited and could be subject to criminal investigation.<sup>3</sup>
- Should a personal relationship already exist when the member of staff or student starts either study or employment, or develop during the course of the student's study, it is the responsibility of the staff member to declare the relationship to the relevant Head of Department/Manager so that appropriate action can be taken.
- Students are encouraged to declare any personal relationship with a staff member to their Course Tutor / Course Director or equivalent as soon as possible, whether this is during the relationship or after the relationship has ended.
- Whenever an intimate relationship between a member of staff and a student is declared, the student will be offered a one-to-one conversation with their Personal Tutor/Course Officer/Programme Director, and the student will be encouraged to discuss the situation and a check should be made on the welfare of the

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<sup>3</sup> Under the Sexual Offences Act 2009, it is potentially a criminal offence for any member of staff to have a sexual relationship with a student under the age of 18.

student.<sup>4</sup>

## 6.2 Relationships between postgraduate or doctoral researcher students and students

- City discourages personal relationships between postgraduate or doctoral researchers and students where a teaching, supervisory or other related responsibility exists.
- Where a personal relationship does exist, the postgraduate or doctoral researcher must inform a senior member of the department who will take the necessary steps to protect the welfare of all parties and to mitigate the risk of any perceived or actual conflict of interest. This will include the removal of any responsibility in the areas of teaching/learning and assessment.
- Students are encouraged to report the relationship to their Course Tutor / Course Director or equivalent as soon as possible.
- Whenever an intimate personal relationship is declared between a postgraduate or doctoral research student and student, the student will be offered a one-to-one conversation with their Personal Tutor/Course Officer/Programme Director, and the student will be encouraged to discuss the situation and a check should be made on the welfare of the student.

## 6.3 Relationships between doctoral research students and supervisors

- A doctoral research student will not normally be accepted for study under the supervision of a staff member with whom they have an existing personal relationship. If a personal relationship does exist, the staff member will be required to declare the relationship to their Dean and to the Assistant Vice-President (Doctoral College) for consideration before the student will be allowed to start study.
- Where a personal relationship develops after the commencement of study, the supervisor will not be allowed to continue to supervise the doctoral research student. The member of staff must declare the relationship to their Dean who will take the necessary steps to protect the welfare of all parties and to mitigate the risk of any perceived or actual conflict of interest. The relationship must also be disclosed to the Assistant Vice-President (Doctoral College).

Alternative supervisory arrangements for the doctoral research student will be organised. If appropriate and where expertise is not available within the University, an external supervisor should be considered.

- Whenever an intimate personal relationship is declared between a doctoral research student and their Supervisor, the student will be offered a one-to-one conversation with their Personal Tutor/Course Officer/Programme Director, and the student will be encouraged to discuss the situation and a check should be made on the welfare of the student.

## 6.4 Relationships between Members of Staff

- Personal relationships must be declared between staff where there is an actual or potential conflict of interest. The disclosure should normally be made from the outset of the relationship.
- Personal relationships may also need to be disclosed if an arising circumstance means an actual or potential conflict of interest could be created; for example, in the case of an internal recruitment process.
- In relationships where there is a different level of seniority between the parties, the more senior member is recognised to have a higher level of responsibility for declaring the relationship for the purpose of ensuring there is no actual or potential conflict of interest.
- A conflict of interest will not always arise (or need to be disclosed) from the fact of co-membership of a particular School or Professional Services. However, where there is a reasonable concern that a conflict of interest might exist, the relationship must be disclosed to the relevant Head of Department/Manager.
- The Head of Department/Manager should take any action that is necessary to protect the interests of all parties. This will include making the relevant Dean, Chief Operating Officer or Professional Service Director aware of the relationship and agreeing any actions that should be taken.
- Members of staff, who are in a line management or supervisory role, or in a more senior position outside the direct management reporting structure, should not normally be involved in management activities or decisions

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<sup>4</sup> Students and Staff are reminded that the University has a range of support services that may be utilised. For further information, see Appendix A

relating to the member of staff with whom they have a personal relationship.

- If there is a potential imbalance of power or authority in the relationship, the relevant manager or a member of the HR team should offer to have a one-to-one conversation with the less senior member of staff to assess consent and the potential for any abuse of power in the relationship.

#### 6.5 Relationships between members of staff and third parties including clients, customers, contractors or suppliers

- Personal relationships between members of staff and third parties including clients, customers, contractors or suppliers must be declared where there is an actual or potential conflict of interest.
- If the staff member's role allows them authority over a client, customer, contractor or supplier; for example, if the member of staff has the authority to decide to whom to award contracts, instruct a contract or commission a piece of work, the relationship must be declared to their Head of Department or Manager for the purposes of determining the appropriate cause of action.

6.6 Staff and, where applicable students (see Clause 6.2), are reminded that any failure to declare a personal relationship could result in disciplinary action under the relevant student or staff procedure.

### 7 Managing Declared Personal Relationships

7.1 Declared personal relationships, will be dealt with as confidentiality and as sensitively as possible so as to protect the dignity and privacy of all parties. Declared former personal relationships, being relationships that have ended, should be managed in the same way if there is still the potential for a conflict of interest to arise and or where there is a potential imbalance of power/authority/influence.

7.2 Appropriate steps will be taken, as necessary, to protect the integrity and welfare of those involved.

7.3 Appropriate steps may include, but will not be limited to,

- Ensuring the member of staff has no role in decision making with regards to responsibility for the student's work, especially when it is subject to assessment;
- Ensuring the member of staff has no role in decision making if the decision potentially affects the individual's learning and development, progression, attainment, and award;
- Ensuring that the relationship does not have an adverse impact on other students and staff;
- Ensuring that a member of staff is not able to make decisions affecting the employment of the other staff member; for example, workload allocation, promotion and career development;
- Providing guidance to staff about the potential impact of close personal relationships, especially where they exist in the same work area, in order that any potential impact on other colleagues or students is considered, understood and can be mitigated.

7.4 To protect the interests of all parties, a record of the declaration and action taken will be made by the relevant person (See Clause 6) using the **Professional Personal Relationships Declaration Form – Appendix C or Appendix D**.

This declaration will be shared with the involved parties and held securely on file compliant with data protection requirements by Human Resources on the employees personal file.

7.5 The Relationship declaration will be maintained and kept up to date as appropriate by the parties until either:

- The student has graduated, plus one year;
- The staff member resigns and/or moves to another area and there is no longer a conflict of interest, plus one year.

7.6 Individuals will have the right for details to be changed, should circumstances alter.

7.7 For further information about how City processes personal data, please see the following privacy notices:

- Privacy Notice for past, present and prospective students of City:  
<https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal/data-protection>
- Privacy notices for past, present and prospective City staff members:  
<https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal/privacy-notice>

7.8 Staff should be aware that any inappropriate breach of confidentiality, relating to a current or former relationship by a manager, HR, or other indirectly informed staff member could negatively impact the colleagues involved and will be treated seriously and could potentially result in disciplinary action.

7.9 Any inappropriate breach of confidentiality by a student may be considered in accordance with the relevant student procedure; for example, the [Student Harassment and Bullying Policy](#).

## 8 Procedure for Reporting Concerns – Staff and Students

8.1 City takes allegations of inappropriate, coercive or predatory behaviour of a sexual nature (Appendix B) seriously and will ensure, allegations of improper conduct arising from either current or former personal relationships will be investigated under the relevant student or staff procedure.<sup>5</sup>

- For staff, such behaviour towards any other member of the University constitutes serious or gross misconduct and will be subject to City's [Disciplinary/Dismissal](#) Procedures, the consequence of which can include dismissal.
- Any student who exerts sexual pressure over another student or a member of staff, or who behaves in a coercive, harassing or predatory manner towards another member of the University, will be subject to the [Student Discipline Regulation](#), the consequences of which can include expulsion from the University.

8.2 Students and staff that have either experienced, suspect or have witnessed inappropriate conduct or an actual or perceived conflict of interest can report the issue in one of the following ways:

- Students - The procedures for reporting or seeking to resolve an issue are outlined in the [Student Sexual Misconduct Policy](#) or [Student Harassment and Bullying Policy](#).
- Staff - Staff wishing to report an issue should do so to their Head of Department/Manager. The issue may be reported in confidence. If it is not possible, or inappropriate to do so, the staff member should report the issue to the relevant Dean, Chief Operating Officer or Professional Services Director or alternatively to the [Director of Human Resources](#) and the issue may be reported in confidence.

Staff may contact their [local HR Manager](#) for guidance if they are uncertain about the actions which should be taken.

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<sup>5</sup> Such behaviour may include, but is not limited to, promising or alluding to rewards in return for sexual favours, or suggesting or threatening withdrawal of teaching or other forms of academic support if sexual access is not granted is prohibited, and may be subject to criminal investigations