

**Staff/Student Personal Relationships:**

 **Policy Statement**

#  Introduction

1.1 Ravensbourne University London (the University) recognises the benefits of staff developing and maintaining professional working relationships with students. This is considered a central component of the educational experience with positive impacts on students’ educational development and welfare.

1.2 A professional relationship is one which may involve responsibility for the student in the form of teaching, assessing, supervising, tutoring, and mentoring. It may involve providing pastoral and/or welfare support, and/or administrative or technical support to a student. In the interests of both parties, appropriate boundaries between staff and students should be clearly established from the outset and maintained through the duration of the period of responsibility.

1.3 A relationship extending beyond these professional boundaries includes the following:

1. **Close personal relationship** – this is not a relationship which involves intimacy but rather a frequency of interactions and/or communications which potentially transgress the boundaries of professional conduct or may be reasonably perceived to do so. An example of this type of relationship could be a relative, a close family friend or a relationship where there is financial or other dependence, for example a landlord/tenant or employment relationship.
2. **Intimate personal relationship –** this is a relationship which is consensual and involves emotional, physical and/or sexual intimacy. This can take many forms, for example in-person, online, or via any other electronic form of communication. Intimate relationships could involve brief or one-off occurrences, through to life-partnerships or marriage.

1.4 The University **prohibits** intimate personal relationships amongst any staff member and a student, except in the limited circumstances described in paragraph 2.6.

1.5 There is an **absolute requirement** for staff to declare all close personal relationships or intimate personal relationships with students via the process described in section 3.

**2.** **Principles**

2.1 It is important to recognise that where close personal relationships or intimate relationships between staff and students develop, whether actual or perceived, several serious issues may arise. These include, but are not limited to:

* risk of sexual misconduct claims
* potential for exploitation
* abuse/imbalance of power
* perceived or actual conflict of interest
* compromising the trust and confidence which underpins the learning experience
* unequal treatment of students.
* negative impact on the student’s educational development and pastoral care
* reputational risk to the individual and organisation involved

2.2 Such issues are especially relevant when the member of staff has direct responsibility for the student. Direct responsibility is defined as the member of staff holding responsibility for one or more of the following: teaching, supervising, selection, marking of students’ work or providing professional or pastoral advice and guidance as part of their role.

2.3 However, the University recognises that defining ‘direct responsibility’ is problematic since the nature of the professional relationship between the staff member and a student may change over time, for example due to the following:

* changes to a staff member’s responsibilities or allocation of duties;
* changes to a student’s course/department/school;
* the possibility that a student may at any point need to interact with a professional service team due to a particular need or requirement.

Additionally, the risk of an abuse of power and a perceived or actual conflict of interest may still occur where there is no direct responsibility for the student, for example in the case of an executive member or other senior member of staff.

2.4 In view of the risks and issues involved, intimate personal relationships and/or between staff and any student(s) are **not permissible**. A staff member has an **absolute requirement** to immediately disclose any such relationship via the process outlined in section 3. Failure to disclose a relationship will be treated more seriously than if the situation is disclosed.

2.5 All staff are expected to act with integrity and not to place themselves in a position of actual or perceived conflict. Pursuing, or seeking to pursue, a personal or intimate relationship with a student or students is a breach of this policy and disciplinary action may be taken in accordance with the University’s [Disciplinary Procedure.](https://ravensbourne.sharepoint.com/sites/HR/SiteAssets/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FHR%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FPolicy%2FDisciplinary%2DProcedure%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FHR%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FPolicy)

2.6 The University recognises that there are certain limited and exceptional circumstances where close personal relationships and/or intimate relationships between students and staff may already exist. These relationships may have begun either prior to the adoption of this policy or prior to one or more of the individuals involved becoming staff members or students. These include:

1. Relationships in place prior to this policy being adopted.
2. Relationships in place prior to the staff member becoming employed; for example: a parent, other relative, employee/r, landlord/tenant, or intimate partner of a student taking employment at Ravensbourne.
3. Relationships in place prior to the student undertaking studies. For example, the existing intimate partner, child or other relative, employee/r, or landlord/tenant of a staff member becoming a Ravensbourne student.
4. Relationships between students and other students who are also staff members, for example casual workers, student ambassadors or sessional staff members who are also students.

2.7 The staff member has an **absolute requirement** to immediately declare an existing close personal relationship or intimate relationship through the process outlined in section 3. This is to ensure appropriate actions and mitigation can be undertaken for the protection of all parties involved. Any such relationship will only be exempted from disciplinary investigation where it is immediately declared.

2.8 If a member of staff is unsure if their relationship with a student should be disclosed under this policy, they should disclose it to err on the side of caution. It is the responsibility of the staff member to ascertain whether their relationship is prohibited.

2.9 If any member of staff becomes aware of a relationship between a colleague and a student, they must disclose this through the relevant process detailed in section three soon as is reasonably practicable.

2.10 Any adult in a “position of trust” who engages in any sexual activity with a person under 18 is committing a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. The University considers that any staff member (including volunteers) who come into contact with under 18s in the course of their employment is considered to be in a position of trust, whether or not they meet the strict legal definition. Any alleged sexual activity between anyone in a position of trust and an under 18-year-old connected with the University will therefore be treated as a serious disciplinary matter and referred to the police.

2.11 When a student is known to be ‘at risk’, such as a vulnerable person, close personal relationships and/or intimate relationships are also strictly prohibited. Any personal relationship formed under these circumstances would constitute gross misconduct and would be dealt with through the University’s [Safeguarding Policy](https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/asset-bucket/prod/2024-11/Safeguarding_Policy.pdf) and/or [Disciplinary Procedure.](https://ravensbourne.sharepoint.com/sites/HR/SiteAssets/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FHR%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FPolicy%2FDisciplinary%2DProcedure%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FHR%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FPolicy) It is often not possible to identify an adult who may be deemed ‘vulnerable’, which is another reason why the University considers it appropriate to prohibit staff-student relationships.

**3.** **Process for disclosing and responding to staff student relationships.**

3.1 The member of staff must inform their Head of Service/Department about the relationship immediately. If the relationship is with the Head of Department/ Service, the relevant Head should inform their Executive Dean or relevant Executive member. This must be done in writing.

3.2 The Head of Department/Service must inform their [People Partner](https://ravensbourne.sharepoint.com/sites/HR/SitePages/Meet-The-Team---HR.aspx) of any such disclosures. If the relationship is with the Head of Department, the Executive Dean or relevant Executive member must inform their [People Partner](https://ravensbourne.sharepoint.com/sites/HR/SitePages/Meet-The-Team---HR.aspx) of any disclosures. This must be done in writing.

3.3 A copy of any disclosure(s) will be retained on the staff member’s personal file.

3.4 Once a relationship has been declared, or has otherwise been identified, People & Culture will investigate the matter under the University’s [Disciplinary Procedure.](https://ravensbourne.sharepoint.com/sites/HR/SiteAssets/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FHR%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FPolicy%2FDisciplinary%2DProcedure%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FHR%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FPolicy)  Failure to disclose a relationship will be treated more seriously than if the situation is disclosed.

3.5 Alongside any action taken under the University’s [Disciplinary Procedure](https://ravensbourne.sharepoint.com/sites/HR/SiteAssets/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FHR%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FPolicy%2FDisciplinary%2DProcedure%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FHR%2FSiteAssets%2FSitePages%2FPolicy), the Head of Department/Service/ Executive member, in liaison with People & Culture and a member of the Student Safeguarding team, will carry out a risk assessment. Appropriate measures will be put in place to mitigate any risks. These may include the member of staff moving roles, another member of staff taking over the marking of the student’s assignments or another member of staff taking responsibility for the student’s pastoral care. The primary aim will be to immediately protect the student from an abuse of power and to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest. A copy of the risk assessment and any agreed mitigation steps will be retained on the staff member’s personal file, along with any action taken through the University’s Disciplinary Procedure.

3.6 As long as the staff member remains employed by the University, the risk assessment must be regularly reviewed.

3.7 Declaration of pre-existing relationships between staff and students who are applying to study at Ravensbourne will be managed with through the University’s admissions process.

3.9 Declaration by an externally applying potential staff member of an existing relationship with a current student will be managed through the recruitment process.

3.10 Declarations of staff/student relationships by a third party may come from a staff member or student. Staff members who become aware of a close personal and/or intimate relationship between a staff member and a student should notify the relevant Head of Department/Service or People Partner immediately. This is for the protection of all parties. Vexatious third-party disclosures or false disclosures made in bad faith may result in disciplinary actions being taken.

3.11 If a student becomes concerned regarding a relationship with a member of staff or about behaviour(s) or conduct breaching professional boundaries, they should raise this with their tutor, Course Leader or Head of Department. Alternatively, they may use the [reporting tool](https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/asset-bucket/prod/2024-11/Safeguarding-Form.pdf) available via the University’s website.

People & Culture

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