



Human Resources

# RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK POLICY

This policy sets out the University’s expectations and requirements in relation to the disclosure of any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest that may occur as a result of relationships at or connected to the workplace

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## **1 Purpose and Scope**

- 1.1 The University values and relies on the professional integrity of its staff. It recognises that there may be occasions when a member of staff's connection to an individual or an organisation may give rise to an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest. In such circumstances, this may lead to a perception or accusation of bias, favouritism, prejudice or potential breaches of confidentiality. Conflicts of interest may be financial or non-financial or both.
- 1.2 All staff are expected to recognise and disclose relationships or connections which may give rise to conflicts of interest or perceptions of conflicts and to disclose this to the University at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to assist staff in identifying when a conflict of interest may exist as a result of a relationship or connection, to confirm the University's expectations and requirements regarding the disclosure of actual or potential conflicts of interest and to outline the procedure used when a conflict of interest exists.
- 1.4 For the purposes of this policy, a personal relationship means either a close family relationship or a romantic, sexual or other intimate relationship. If a member of staff is unclear as to whether they have or are in what would be deemed to be a personal relationship under this policy, further advice should be sought from the HR department. The University encourages staff to always disclose a relationship or connection if they are in doubt that it represents a conflict of interest.
- 1.5 In the situation where a conflict of interest is not managed effectively and transparently, this may cause serious damage to the reputation of the University and to the staff members concerned.
- 1.6 The existence of an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest does not necessarily imply wrongdoing on anyone's part. However, any private, personal or commercial interests which give rise to an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest must be recognised, disclosed appropriately and appropriately managed.
- 1.7 This policy applies to all members of staff. Where staff are also enrolled as students at the University, they are defined for the purposes of this policy by their staff status. Where students are employed part-time by the University they are defined for the purposes of this policy, by their principal status at the institution (i.e. that of a student) and not as a member of staff.

## **2 Relationships between staff members**

- 2.1 Occasionally personal relationships between members of staff may lead to actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest – for example, where a family member (e.g. a sibling or a child) commences work at the University and within the same or an associated department to their relative, or if a member of staff already has or develops a personal relationship with someone for whom they have or could have a line management responsibility.

- 2.2 Where such a relationship exists or develops between staff members and the existence of this relationship may lead to an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest between their work responsibilities and their personal circumstances, the relationship must be disclosed to the Head of School, Head of Professional Service or other relevant senior manager as soon as possible and for any new relationship, within no more than one month of it commencing. A template disclosure form is available at [Appendix A](#).
- 2.3 Similarly, where there is a potential employment opportunity for an individual with whom an existing staff member has such a relationship, the staff member must declare the relationship to their Head of School, Head of Professional Service or other relevant senior manager in the event that a potential conflict of interest is identified, for example involvement on an interview panel, potential for future line management responsibilities etc. In such situations the staff member will not be permitted to be involved in any associated recruitment and selection process.
- 2.4 Where the University is made aware of such a relationship it will consider the appropriate action to take in order to protect the integrity and interests of all parties and the University.
- 2.5 The person to whom the disclosure is made is responsible for ensuring, where necessary and after discussion with the staff member concerned, that appropriate alternative arrangements are made with respect to any existing line management arrangements between the staff members, as well as any approval processes such as staffing requests, budget expenditure and expenses claims. It is expected that arrangements will be in place to avoid any potential conflict in relation to recruitment, selection, appraisal, reward, promotion or any other management activity involving the other member of staff.
- 2.6 Details of any alternative arrangements that have been put in place should be recorded on the disclosure form by the Head of School/Professional Service. If the staff member has any concerns about the nature and extent of any alternative arrangements implemented, they should speak to their designated HR Business Partner as soon as possible.
- 2.7 This record will be held confidentially on the HR file of the member of staff and will remain on the individual's file for either as long as they remain an employee of the University, or from the point of disclosure plus 6 years (whichever is the lesser).
- 2.8 In the event that it is not possible to alter existing line management arrangements within the existing roles, the University may decide that it is appropriate to redeploy one party to avoid situations that could represent a conflict of interest. The manager would consult with all concerned parties before any final decision was made. The impact on the work of the University will be the primary consideration when considering which staff member will be redeployed and the assessment of impact will be made objectively and documented. Wherever possible, any new role should be as similar as

possible to the current role in terms of status and pay. Redeployment may be subject to a trial period.

- 2.9 The University will explore all available options in relation to redeployment and take all possible steps to consider the extent to which redeployment can be supported however staff should be aware that if redeployment were not possible, the University may, as a last resort, have to consider whether it is necessary for one of the staff members to leave the University's employment.
- 2.10 Employees who have such relationships at work are expected to conduct themselves with the same level of professionalism as is expected of all employees and need to be aware at all times of their behaviour towards each other within the working environment.
- 2.11 If a staff member advises that a relationship has come to an end, the Head of School/Professional Service, will need to consider whether existing alternative arrangements remain in place and whether any new arrangements are needed to protect both parties.
- 2.12 Failure to disclose the existence of such a relationship and which subsequently then results in the University's academic, administrative or institutional processes being compromised, may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the University's Staff Disciplinary Procedure.

### **3 Relationships between Staff and Students (including Research Degree Students)**

- 3.1 The University recognises that there may be occasions when a staff member has a pre-existing personal relationship with a student - for example, due to their child or partner choosing to study at the University.
- 3.2 In situations where a staff member has a pre-existing personal relationship with a potential student, this will not be a barrier to the potential student or staff member being able to work or study at the University. However, where the relationship may create an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest, the relationship must be disclosed by the existing or potential staff member at the time the student or the member of staff joins or applies to join the University. This is to ensure that any potential conflict of interest can be managed. A template disclosure form is available at [Appendix A](#).
- 3.3 The person to whom the disclosure is made is responsible for ensuring, where necessary and after discussion with the staff member concerned, that appropriate alternative arrangements are made with respect to any potential or actual conflict of interest. Steps will be taken to ensure that the member of staff are not in a position to make or be in a position to potentially influence decisions affecting the student - such examples include, but are not limited to, assessments, moderation, standardisation or reassessment of student work, exam boards, degree classification, the allocation of scholarships or loans, the awarding of facilities or benefits of any kind. Consideration must also be given to any other possible concerns of fellow students and staff.

- 3.4 Details of any alternative arrangements that have been put in place should be recorded on the disclosure form by the Head of School/Professional Service. If the staff member has any concerns about the nature and extent of any alternative arrangements implemented, they should speak to their designated HR Business Partner as soon as possible.
- 3.5 This record will be held confidentially on the HR file of the member of staff and will remain on the individual's file for either as long as they remain an employee of the University, or from the point of disclosure plus 6 years (whichever is the lesser).
- 3.6 Staff are also required to advise the Head of School/Professional Service if their pre-existing relationship with a current student comes to an end. It may still be appropriate in such circumstances for a member of staff to continue with alternative arrangements even after the relationship has come to an end.
- 3.7 In the event that a member of staff fails to disclose the existence of any such relationship, they will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the University's Staff Disciplinary Procedure.
- 3.8 The University **prohibits any sexual or intimate relationship between staff and students where the relationship was not pre-existing**. Please refer to the University's [Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment Policy](#) for further guidance. Any such relationships would be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the University's Staff Disciplinary Procedure.

#### **4 Relationships between staff and personal or business associates**

- 4.1 If staff are involved in University business with an organisation or individual with whom they have a personal or outside business relationship, and where there could be an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest, they are asked to disclose this to [unisec@worc.ac.uk](mailto:unisec@worc.ac.uk) by completing the disclosure form at [Appendix B](#). This is in order to ensure that the existence of any such relationship does not influence any business decisions taken on behalf of the University, create a situation where there appears to be an opportunity for a member of staff to make a personal gain, or pose any conflict of interest between an individual's University responsibilities and their personal circumstances.
- 4.2 Where the University is made aware of such relationships, it will consider the appropriate action to take in order to protect the integrity and interests of all concerned.
- 4.3 Staff members who are members of the University Leadership Group, or who work in procurement, project management or estates, are also required to complete the annual related parties disclosure in order to identify any personal or outside business relationships that may impact on their role and responsibilities for the University. Such disclosures should also be made to [unisec@worc.ac.uk](mailto:unisec@worc.ac.uk) by completing the disclosure form at [Appendix B](#).

## **5 Failure to disclose a potential conflict of interest linked to a relationship at or connected to the workplace**

- 5.1 Failure to follow the procedure set out in this policy or failure to comply with any arrangements put in place to manage a disclosed conflict will be considered a serious matter and may lead to disciplinary action.
- 5.2 If a student has any concerns about a potential conflict of interest between themselves and a staff member, or if they have any concerns about the potential existence of a conflict of interest between a fellow student and a member of staff, they should seek advice from Student Support and Wellbeing Service by emailing [studentlife@worc.ac.uk](mailto:studentlife@worc.ac.uk) or through **firstpoint**. If they have any concerns about potentially inappropriate behaviour within that relationship, they should be referred to the University's [Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment policy](#) for further advice on next steps and potential reporting mechanisms.
- 5.3 If a member of staff has any concerns about the potential existence of a conflict of interest between a member of staff and a student, or between two members of staff, they should report their concerns to their HR Business Partner or seek advice from a trusted member of staff. If they have any concerns about potentially inappropriate behaviour within that relationship, they should refer to the University's [Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment policy](#) for further advice on next steps and potential reporting mechanisms.
- 5.4 Any concerns raised will be investigated in accordance with either this or the University's [Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment policy](#) dependent upon the nature and potential severity of those concerns.

## **6 Existing relationships at the time this policy is published**

- 6.1 Members of staff must, within one month of this policy being published, declare any existing personal relationship they have with students (even if such a relationship is already known to their line manager). A template disclosure form is available at [Appendix A](#).
- 6.2 Providing such relationships are disclosed as stipulated above, this will not be deemed to be in breach of this or the University's [Preventions of Sexual Misconduct and Harassment policy](#) and therefore will not be subject to disciplinary action.
- 6.3 Members of staff must, within one month of this policy being published, declare any existing personal relationship they have with another colleague/s and where there could be an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest to their Head of School / Professional Service. A template disclosure form is available at [Appendix A](#).

6.4 In accordance with the principles outlined in Sections 2 and 3 above, the University reserves the right to address and implement any necessary measures to remove any potential conflict of interest, or to remove any direct, professional or line management responsibility in any such disclosed cases.

6.5 In the event that a member of staff fails to disclose the existence of any such relationship, or they fail to do so within the specified timeframe of one month as detailed in clause 6.1 above, they will be subject to disciplinary action.

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Related Policies, Procedures, Guidance, Forms or Templates	Relationships at Work Policy – Appendix A – Staff Disclosure Form – February 2022 Relationships at Work Policy – Appendix B – Related Parties Declaration Form – February 2022 Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment Policy – February 2022
Policy/Policies Superseded by this document	Consensual Relationships Policy – May 2013