1. Policy Aim

The University promotes itself as a community where people work and/or study together. It seeks to promote harmonious relations between all members of that community, including between members of staff and students. At the same time the University regards relationships between members of staff and a student – for whom they have, or are likely to have some specific academic, professional, management or pastoral responsibility – as an important professional issue, particularly where relationships are close, intimate/or exclusive. This code provides guidance for those in close/intimate exclusive relationships, seeks to protect the integrity of all students and staff from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest and to avoid behaviours that give rise to complaints.

2. Scope

This policy covers close, intimate and/or exclusive relationships, between staff and students of the University. It covers all areas where such relationships raise questions about conflict of interest, trust and/or confidentiality, which may occur on the outset, during or on the termination on a close, intimate and/or exclusive relationship. It covers conflict, which may arise in the following areas;

- Management and supervision
- All aspects of teaching and learning
- Pastoral care
- Assignment work and facilities to students

3. Relationships between staff and students

The University considers that close, intimate and/or exclusive relationships between staff and the students whom they teach, assess or are otherwise responsible for, raise serious questions of conflict of interest, trust and confidence and dependency in working relationships and of equal treatment in teaching, learning, selection, assessment and research. There is a danger that such relationships exploit the relationship of authority and trust that is inherent in the relationship between members of staff and students.

For the protection of staff and students the boundaries and moral obligations of the professional role of staff must be fully recognised and respected. Staff should recognise their professional and ethical responsibilities to protect the interests of students, to respect the trust involved in the staff/student relationship and to accept the obligations inherent in that responsibility. While the University recognises that it has no right to regulate the private lives
of its staff, it would strongly advise staff not to enter into a close, intimate and/or exclusive relationship with a student for whom they have responsibility.

To embark on a close, intimate and/or exclusive relationship with a student will always involve serious risks and may involve difficulties rooted in the unequal power, and hence choice, of the parties concerned, as well as real problems in maintaining the boundaries of professional and personal life. Such relationships can also disrupt the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues.

In the event of involvement in a relationship with a student, particularly where it is a close, intimate and/or exclusive one, the member of staff must inform their Head of School/Unit or Human Resources so that the University can facilitate the re-organisation of duties to minimise contact and ensure the member of staff is not supervising, assessing, providing pastoral care or tutoring the student involved. This will ensure fair and equitable treatment and protect both staff and students from any perceptions of favouritism, which could lead to dissent amongst the student body and loss of faith in the academic process. Any declaration of this kind will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

4. Practice/Procedure

When the University have been informed of a relationship covered by policy it will consider appropriate action in a manner that protects the integrity of all parties. Such action is likely to involve re-organisation of duties to minimise contact between the staff and student member. This will ensure fair and equitable treatment and protect both staff and students from any perceptions of favouritism, which could lead to dissent amongst the student body and loss of faith in the academic process. The member of staff/student will be consulted with and expected to comply with reasonable action. The University will ensure these matters are dealt with confidentially and as sensitivity as possible.

Appropriate action may include:

- making alternative arrangements to ensure the member of staff does not have sole responsibility for the student’s work or making decision effecting the student e.g. academic assessment, allocations of grants for research, research facilities etc.
- ensuring the appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential effect for the relationship on other students and staff.

To protect the interests of all parties a record of the action taken e.g. relocation of professional/pastoral responsibility for particular activities may be made.

Failure of a member of staff to declare a close/intimate or exclusive relationship which leads to a conflict of interest which results in the academic, administrative or institutional processes been brought into question, will be investigated and may lead to disciplinary action being taken. Likewise, any member of staff who finds him or herself the subject of a complaint may, following investigation, face disciplinary action. However, any complaint found to be made in malice could lead to disciplinary action against the complainant.
5. Advice and Guidance

Staff who are uncertain about what action should be taken can seek advice from Human Resources in confidence at humres@st-andrews.ac.uk or on ext. 3096. Students should contact Student Support Services at sss@st-andrews.ac.uk or on ext. 2720.

Experience has shown that cases of alleged serious sexual harassment have emerged where a colleague has failed either to maintain a professional distance from students or to alert colleagues to a significant personal interest in a student. In particular the structurally unbalanced power of a relationship between staff in an academic or professional role, means that they are especially vulnerable to accusations of sexual harassment if they engage in sexual relationships with students.

Students or staff alike who find themselves in receipt of unwanted/inappropriate behaviours or involved in a relationship that they do not consider to be truly consensual or have been personally adversely affected by a misuse of power/authority or conflict of interest, should raise this matter with their Head of School/Unit, Human Resources or Student Support Services in the first instance.

Human Resources
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