

# Guidelines: managing personal relationships at work

Approved by Finance & Human Resources Committee 11.03.03

Updated March 2007 following consultation with Senior Managers and the trades unions

Updated September 2011 following consultation with the unions; SMG; and SRC

January 2017: minor updates

February 2019: Guidelines reviewed by HR; no amendments made

# Guidelines: managing personal relationships at work

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 These guidelines are to assist heads of schools and directors in managing personal relationships in their school or department, where members of staff may be faced with situations where personal interest conflicts with their duties and might be uncertain about how to deal with them.
- 1.2 Personal relationships refer to, 'intimate relationships' or 'close personal or family relationships' and apply to those relationships between people in the same team or department; between a line manager and one of their team; or between a member of staff and a student that could potentially be problematic. It does not refer to straightforward friendships between colleagues. These guidelines apply to all personal relationships.

## 2. Advice for staff

- 2.1 Staff may find that a relationship with either a student or another member of staff results in a possible conflict of interest. Teaching staff in particular should be aware that entering into a sexual/romantic liaison with students could jeopardise their professional relationship and may involve an abuse of their authority.

## 3. Relationships between staff and students

- 3.1 London Metropolitan University values good professional relationships between its staff and students both within and outside the institution. These relationships are reliant upon mutual trust and confidence and they could be jeopardised when a member of staff has an intimate relationship with a student.
- 3.2 The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000 makes it a criminal offence for a person to engage in any kind of sexual activity with a person under 18 where the adult is in a position of trust. Teaching staff are considered to be in a position of trust with students, regardless of whether they actually teach them.
- 3.3 In the case of an intimate relationship between a lecturer and a student it is important that the lecturer does not directly assess the student's work. Likewise, where a relationship has ended, it is strongly advisable that the lecturer does not directly assess the student's work. The lecturer would be allowed to participate in assessment/field/awards boards as the student's results will be discussed in a group.
- 3.4 This is to ensure impartiality in the assessment of the student's work and to prevent allegations of favouritism, similarly staff involved in such a relationship may be in danger of dealing with the student negatively in order to emphasise the intention not to show favour.
- 3.5 Where a professional service department (PSD) member of staff is having/has had a relationship with a student, it is equally important they do not place themselves open to any accusations of favouritism or dealing with the student negatively in order to make clear the intention not to show favour.

- 3.6 Staff who are or have been in a relationship with a student and believe there may be an actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest should inform their head or director, who will ensure that alternative arrangements are made for the assessment of that student's work. The head or director will treat the matter in the strictest of confidence. Where there is a close personal or family relationship or other potentially compromising relationship between a student and a teacher, this raises ethical and professional issues. In these circumstances, members of staff are advised to declare such relationships in confidence to their head/director.
- 3.7 Where a student is or has been involved in such a relationship and believes that the head/director has not been informed, they are advised to ask the head/director to arrange for their work to be assessed by another member of staff.

#### **4. Relationships between colleagues**

- 4.1 Where an intimate relationship occurs (or has existed) between members of staff, each member of staff has a duty to declare the relationship and must ensure that they are not involved in the assessment of the other, for example, in matters of appointment, promotion, allocation of duties and disciplinary action including dismissal. This is to ensure impartiality and to prevent allegations of favouritism or negative treatment from arising. If a member of staff has any queries in this respect they should discuss them with their line manager in the first instance.
- 4.2 Where a close personal or family relationship exists between a member of staff and their line manager this should be declared to the head/director if there is a perceived, actual or potential conflict of interest. They should not take part in the recruitment and selection; appraisal; or promotion of the member of staff that they manage.

#### **5. Recruitment**

- 5.1 To ensure equality of opportunity, applicants for employment at the university are required to declare if they are related to someone who works or is a student at the institution.

#### **6. Grounds for disciplinary action**

- 6.1 If a member of staff treats a student/member of staff more or less favourably as a consequence of an existing or previous intimate relationship, the matter will be regarded as a very serious abuse of their position. This will be treated as grounds for disciplinary action, which could result in dismissal from the university if the allegations are substantiated.
- 6.2 If a member of staff believes that they have been harassed by a member of staff or a student, the harassment policy and procedure should be followed.

#### **7. Further Information**

- 7.1 Confidential and general advice (for both staff and students) on these guidelines can be obtained from Human Resources.