**Staff and Student Relationships Policy**

The University of Reading is committed to ensuring that everyone within our community is treated with dignity, respect and courtesy at all times and to the prevention of harassment and bullying for all staff and students. **The University will not tolerate sexual harassment or violence.**

These principles apply to interactions between staff and students: sexual harassment or violence will not be tolerated between a member of staff and a student. It is incumbent on staff to understand what behaviours may amount to sexual harassment and to avoid it. Students are entitled to attend University without fear of unwanted sexual approaches or being put in uncomfortable situations by members of staff. All staff should be aware and comply with the University’s [Equal Opportunities Policy](https://www.reading.ac.uk/diversity/-/media/project/functions/diversity/documents/equalopportunitiespolicyfinaljuly17.pdf?la=en&hash=2B355698C0CD1CF28AA819CA092EC616) and the [Harassment and Bullying Policy Statement](https://www.reading.ac.uk/diversity/harassment-reporting-and-support).

**Trust is fundamental to the professional relationship between members of staff and students.** Relationships between staff and students may lead to a conflict of interests that undermine the University’s academic integrity or its obligation to promote student wellbeing. The University is concerned about the asymmetrical nature of power within staff/student relationships. This asymmetry exists as a consequence of the nature of the roles of most of our staff and, as a consequence, **we prohibit intimate personal relationships between staff and students wherever there is an actual or potential power relationship or conflict of interest between the member of staff and the student,** as set out in paragraph 3.2 below.

Equally we have a legal and ethical responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of our staff, and we will not tolerate malicious or vexatious accusations against them of improper conduct. To that end, we are introducing a requirement to report relationships between staff and students such that where necessary steps can be taken to protect both staff and students. Those steps would include for example ensuring that the member of staff was not in any professional connection to the student.

1. **About this policy**

## The University’s Staff and Students Relationships Policy governs personal relationships between staff and students. A personal relationship is described in paragraph 1.4.

## The purpose of this policy is to:

### protect students from improper conduct by members of staff;

### protect staff from accusations of improper conduct by proving a mechanism for reporting, so that appropriate safeguards (for staff and students) can be put in place; and

### protect the University from complaints, claims and disruption.

## This policy includes a mandatory reporting process to help mitigate any conflicts of interest where relationships do exist, and prohibits romantic, sexual or intimate relationships in some circumstances.

## Personal relationships are defined under this policy as:

### A family relationship

### A business/commercial/financial relationship

### A romantic, sexual or intimate relationship, however brief.

## This policy does not include situations where the member of staff has social interaction with students, for example because they are members of the same local association or club. This policy only applies where there is a personal relationship of the type described in paragraph 1.4.

## If a member of staff has any doubt about whether a relationship with a student falls under the definitions of a ‘personal relationship’ they should make a report in line with this policy.

## For the purposes of this policy a member of staff will include any individual who is working under a contract of employment with the University or is a casual worker and any other individual who is engaged by the University.

## For the purposes of this policy a student is any individual who is a student or attendee on any course arranged by or through the University of Reading or a subsidiary of it. This includes those on foundation, undergraduate, post-graduate taught and post-graduate research programmes, students on exchange programmes, those undertaking non-credit bearing programmes of any duration and those studying at a distance.

## On some occasions, students may also carry out paid work for the University. Staff should treat such students in paid work as a student for the purposes of this policy, even if they meet the student because of the paid work that student is undertaking.

## When students undertake paid work for the University whereby they are placed in a position of trust with other students (for example, a PhD student regularly teaches or demonstrates to other students) the obligations placed on staff under this policy will apply to them.

## This policy applies to relationships formed or occurring both online (including on social media) and in person. To be clear, this policy does not seek to prevent staff and students connecting over social media (where the University’s Social Media Policy will apply); however, where that connection becomes a personal relationship as defined in clause 1.4, it must be reported as set out below, even if that relationship is conducted entirely over social media.

## It is intended that this policy will apply across the University group (including to its subsidiary companies) anywhere in the world.

## Any member of staff who is in or has been in a personal relationship with a student must comply with the obligations set out in this policy. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action being taken.

## This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment or any student’s contract with the University and it may be amended at any time.

# Who is responsible for this policy?

## The University Secretary has overall responsibility for this policy.

## The policy will be reviewed every three years by the University Secretary. Material changes to it will be discussed with Reading University and College Union, the University’s Staff Forum and the Reading University Students’ Union.

# Relationships between members of staff and students

## Any member of staff who is or has been in a personal relationship (as defined in 1.4) with any person who is now a student of the University must report the relationship promptly to their Head of School or Head of Directorate so that appropriate measures and safeguards can be put in place to protect both students and staff in conjunction with the parties involved in the relationship, where appropriate. Heads of School and Directorate should work with their HR Partner in determining and putting in place these measures, to ensure a proportionate and consistent approach. It is the duty of the member of staff to report the relationship; it is not the responsibility of the student to do so and a report should be made even if the student has asked that it is not. While the responsibility under this policy lies with the member of staff, a student may report a relationship with a member of staff, and can do so by reporting to their School Director of Academic Tutoring , the School Director of Post Graduate Research Studies or a member of staff in the Student Welfare Team. For the avoidance of doubt, a student reporting a personal relationship under this policy will not be treated less favourably or penalised for doing so.

## **There are some cases where the University explicitly prohibits the formation of romantic, sexual or intimate relationships between members of staff and students**. This is where the member of staff is in a professional relationship with the student, and includes the following scenarios, which is not an exhaustive list. Where the member of staff:

### is a member of Senior Leadership, including staff who are on the University Executive Board, or who are Heads of School, Heads of Directorate or Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellors

### works in the same School that the student studies in or, in the situation that the student studies across Schools, where the member of staff works in any School involved in the provision of the student’s programme;

### works in a different School from the student but has a direct educational relationship with the student, for example assessing or teaching a particular module that the student studies;

### is a warden;

### works in Student Services within; a Support Centre, Examinations, Graduation and Student Records, Student Finance, International Advisory, Student Wellbeing or the Student Welfare Team;

### works in the Student Complaints, Appeals and Discipline Team

### works in Security Services; or

### works in an equivalent role to the above in Henley Business School or the Doctoral and Researcher College or in an equivalent role internationally.

## In the event that a romantic, sexual or intimate relationship of the kind set out in clause 3.2 above already exists prior to this policy coming into force, the relationship must be reported as soon as possible in accordance with clause 3.1 so that the University can put in place practical steps to ensure that neither the student nor the member of staff are advantaged or disadvantaged.

## It is recognised that occasionally a new member of staff may have an existing relationship of the kind set out in clause 3.2 above with a current student, or an existing member of staff may have a relationship with a student who is due to start at the University. The University would not prohibit such an existing relationship and such a relationship would not impact applications by staff or students to the University, but the relationship must be reported by the member of staff to their HR Partner or the relevant Head of School or Head of Directorate as soon as the job offer is accepted or an applicant accepts an offer of study in order that practical steps can be put in place to ensure that neither the student nor the member of staff is advantaged or disadvantaged.

## Members of staff should not enter into a business, commercial or financial relationship with a student which could compromise or could be perceived to compromise the objectivity and professional standing of their professional duty to the student.

## Should a member of staff have any doubt about whether a personal relationship exists between them and a student, they should either discuss it with their line manager or Head of School or Directorate , or speak to their HR Partner. If there is any residual doubt, members of staff should make a report.

## The obligation to make a report in accordance with clause 3.1 is a continuing one, for example if circumstances change and a personal relationship falls under clause 3.2 because a student has selected a particular module, or a member of staff moves to a different School. In such circumstances, clause 3.3 will be applied.

## Once the relationship has been reported, the Head of School or Directorate , working with the HR Partner, will consider any practical steps that need to be put in place to ensure that neither the member of staff nor the student are advantaged or disadvantaged, for example, making arrangements to ensure that the member of staff does not have responsibility for making academic decisions about the student’s work. The Head of School or Directorate will discuss any procedures that it requires to be put in place with the member of staff and, where appropriate, with the student so that they are clear on the University’s requirements. The member of staff and the student will be required to follow any procedures put in place and failure to do so may result in disciplinary action. The student’s academic tutor and other relevant parties may be notified of the relationship.

# Record keeping

## Following a report of a personal relationship, a record will be kept of the report along with any procedures put in place by the University. This record will be held in accordance with paragraph 5 below.

## Records of a personal relationship between a member of staff and a student will be kept by the Head of School or Directorate . The records will be destroyed six (6) years after the last person in the relationship has left the University, in accordance with the University’s retention schedule.

# Confidentiality

## The University will deal with reports of personal relationships with due respect for the privacy of any individuals involved however there should be no normal expectation that the relationship will be kept confidential and staff should understand that it may be necessary to make specific University departments aware of relationships.

# Staff and students who become aware of a relationship that they think should be reported

## In the event that a member of staff becomes aware of the existence of a personal relationship between a member of staff and a student, they must report the relationship to the Head of School or Directorate of the staff member in the relationship. Alternatively the member of staff could report the relationship to their HR Partner or their own Head of School or Directorate .

## In the event that a student becomes aware of and is concerned about the existence of a personal relationship between a member of staff and a student, they may, but are not required to:

### Report the relationship to their School Director of Academic Tutoring , the School Director of Post Graduate Research Studies or a member of staff in the Student Welfare Team; or

### Report the relationship through the Student Concerns Process; or

### Report to or seek advice from the RUSU Advice Service.

## Following a report made under this clause 6, the University will make appropriate enquiries in a sensitive manner and confidentiality will be observed wherever possible

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