



# **Relationships between Students & Staff Policy**

<b>Core Documentation Cover Page</b>					
<b>Relationships between Students &amp; Staff Policy</b>					
<b>Version number</b>	<b>Dates produced and approved (include committee)</b>	<b>Reason for production/ revision</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Location(s)</b>	<b>Proposed next review date and approval required</b>
V1.0	Aug 2012 Academic Council	To provide clear guidelines regarding relationships between students and staff and the responsibilities of both should a relationship other than that which is professional develop to ensure that the integrity of the UCO's academic standards are maintained appropriately.	Corporate Services Director	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Intranet	Aug 2013
V2.0	Sep 2013 Academic Council	Annual Review Minor Amendments to reflect current practice.	Corporate Services Director	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Intranet	Sep 2015
V3.0	Aug 2017 PRAG Chair	Administrative Amendments to update institution name change from British School of Osteopathy to University College of Osteopathy and to update staff role titles.	HR Manager	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Intranet	Sep 2015
V4.0	May 2018 PRAG Chair	Administrative Amendments to reflect title changes (i.e. from Principal to Vice-Chancellor, etc.)	HR Manager	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Intranet	Sep 2015
V5.0	Nov 2023 Academic Council	Policy revised in entirety to align to new Office for Students expectations.	Vice-Chancellor	All master versions will be held in: Quality Team Published: Website	Nov 2026

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<b>Equality Impact</b>	
Positive equality impact (i.e. the policy/procedure/guideline significantly reduces inequalities)	
Neutral equality impact (i.e. no significant effect)	X
Negative equality impact (i.e. increasing inequalities)	
<b>If you have any feedback or suggestions for enhancing this policy, please email your comments to: <a href="mailto:quality@uco.ac.uk">quality@uco.ac.uk</a></b>	

## Relationships Between Students & Staff Policy

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### 1. Scope of Policy

- 1.1 This policy provides clear guidelines regarding relationships between students and staff at the UCO.
- 1.2 This policy is applicable to both students and staff and has been designed to align to the Office for Students' (OfS) expectations regarding for preventing and addressing harassment and sexual misconduct affecting students in higher education<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.3 In the context of this policy the term 'student' includes an existing student of the UCO whether they are on 'Time Out' or not, an applicant who is in the process of applying to study at the UCO or an offer holder, who has received an offer (conditional or unconditional) to study at the UCO.

### 2. Positive Professional Relationships

- 2.1 Positive professional relationships between members of staff and students are central to students' educational development and welfare. However, personal relationships<sup>2</sup> between students and staff can cause significant problems because of conflicts of interest, imbalance of power and authority, perceived favouritism, and undermining trust and confidence in the academic process. Being a member of the UCO staff brings with it specific duties and responsibilities. This policy concerns consensual relationships - non-consensual behaviour is covered in the Dignity at UCO Policy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/prevent-and-address-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/statement-of-expectations/>

<sup>2</sup> The OfS defines a 'Personal Relationship' as including "i. physical intimacy including isolated or repeated sexual activity; ii. romantic or emotional intimacy; and/or iii. financial dependency"

- 2.2 To protect the welfare of students and in the best interests of staff:
- a) Staff are prohibited from entering a personal relationship<sup>2</sup> with a student.
  - b) Staff are strongly discouraged from friendships (See Section 3) with a student that transgresses the boundaries of professional conduct and requires such relationships to be declared.
  - c) Staff must declare to their line manager as soon as possible if a personal relationship has developed, is developing or appears likely to develop between them and any student for whom they have any responsibility.
- 2.3 Staff who fail to comply with this policy or any protective arrangements put in place may be disciplined.
- 2.4 Where at the policy commencement date, a staff member;
- a) is already in a personal relationship with a student; or
  - b) has previously been in a personal relationship with a student:  
they should declare that relationship to their line manager within two months immediately following the policy commencement date.
- 2.5 In the rare circumstances where this policy is breached unintentionally, for example, where a staff member is unaware the other party is a student and had no reasonable basis to suspect it, the staff member should inform their line manager as soon as they become aware of the situation.
- 2.6 Staff members must never knowingly enter a personal relationship with a student, applicant or offer holder. Staff are reminded that personal relationships involving students (including applicants or offer-holders) under the age of eighteen, where the staff member is in a position of trust or where the student is an adult at risk suffering from certain mental disabilities could fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. If any such cases arise, a UCO Safeguarding Officer will consider whether to notify the police or take disciplinary action.
- 2.7 Staff are reminded that such personal relationships can run into difficulties and give rise to negative consequences for student welfare, formal complaints or concerns rooted in actual or perceived inequalities of power, accusations of bias or exploitation and questions about the nature of consent, which may amount to sexual misconduct<sup>3</sup>. The risks of such complaints or concerns are likely to be heightened when (for example) there is a significant age difference between the staff member and the student; the student is undertaking their first-degree following school and/or the student is more vulnerable because of specific disabilities or health conditions.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Sexual misconduct' means any unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature and includes but is not limited to: i. sexual harassment as defined by section 26(2) of the [Equality Act 2010](#); and ii. assault as defined by the [Sexual Offences Act 2003](#); and iii. rape as defined by the [Sexual Offences Act 2003](#).

### 3. Personal Relationships

- 3.1 The UCO does not seek to discourage positive relationships between staff and students. It may be appropriate for staff and students for whom they have a responsibility to jointly participate in informal, social or leisure activities, providing due regard is given to potential conflicts, professional norms and boundaries, and to how any such behaviour might be perceived.
- 3.2 In all personal and professional relationships with students, all UCO staff must act in a way which safeguards student welfare. This includes being mindful of professional boundaries to uphold standards of academic integrity and avoid conflicts of interest. Personal relationships between students and staff can cause significant issues because of conflicts of interest, imbalances of power and authority, perceived favouritism and undermining of trust and confidence in the academic process, and difficulties identified in Paragraph 2.7.
- 3.3 While personal relationships with students for whom staff have responsibility are prohibited, any friendship relationship is also strongly discouraged and must be declared.
- 3.4 It is impossible to cover every potential situation which might involve (or be perceived to involve) transgression of the boundaries of professional conduct. But any relationship which involves (or is perceived to involve) any of the following characteristics will continually transgress the boundaries of professional conduct and must be declared:
- a) any form of dependence, whether emotional, practical, financial, or otherwise, and whether the student appears dependent on the member of staff or vice versa; or
  - b) favouritism towards any student (which might include, for example, circumstances where a student is treated in a way that is exclusive or exceptional).
- 3.5 If in doubt, the best course is to declare a relationship or any interaction with a student that is of concern so that appropriate measures (to protect both the student and the member of staff) can be considered.

### 4. Guidance for Staff

- 4.1 This guidance supports line managers with notifications they may receive through this policy. It does not cover all scenarios and will often need to be supplemented by HR advice.
- a) Notifications to Heads of Department
- 4.2 Line Managers may receive notifications in relation to this policy from staff members, students or third parties. Notifications should be in compliance with a requirement of this policy, in respect of an allegation that the policy has been breached, or both. If the Line Manager is involved, notifications should be reported to a Deputy Vice-Chancellor. If the member of staff is a member of SMT or the VC's group, then the Vice-Chancellor should be informed of notifications. If the VC has allegations made against them, then the Chair of the Board of Directors will receive notifications. Any member of staff or student who has questions about this

policy and its application may also raise them with the HR department in the first instance.

- 4.3 Initial action by one of the staff members above when a notification is received will include:
- a) acknowledge the notification in writing and signpost any forms of welfare support that may be helpful;
  - b) so far as possible, treat the notification in confidence (see additional guidance on confidentiality below);
  - c) seek advice from HR staff;
  - d) consider whether it is necessary to re-organise duties to minimise professional contact with the relevant student.

b) Next Steps

- 4.4 After any appropriate protective measures have been put in place, consider whether any further actions might be necessary, which may include (for example):
- a) ensuring that any individuals affected are aware of the UCO's support services;
  - b) in cases where there is a failure to comply with the policy and arrangements put in place under the policy, taking appropriate action under the relevant UCO Disciplinary Procedures;
  - c) ensuring good record-keeping, e.g., any relevant correspondence is saved with HR;
  - d) learning lessons for the future, e.g., were wider questions raised about appropriate boundaries, and, if so, is there a need for training?
- 4.5 Concerns raised under this policy should be treated in confidence as far as that is reasonably possible and consistent with upholding the welfare of students.
- 4.6 As far as possible, communications regarding changes to practical arrangements necessitated by this policy should be neutral, limited to essential facts, and avoid publicising the situation that gave rise to them.

c) Principles for Taking Protective Measures

- 4.7 When a line manager (or equivalent post-holder) arranges any protective measures following a declaration of an intimate or close personal relationship, they should:
- a) ensure the student and staff member are both aware of the disclosure; and
  - b) seek advice from HR staff or a Deputy Vice-Chancellor; and
  - c) seek to protect the dignity and privacy of all parties as far as reasonably possible; and
  - d) ensure any measures protect the student's best interests (in welfare and academic terms) while avoiding a conflict of interest or grounds of complaint for the staff member, as far as reasonably possible. This may include identifying alternative

sources of pastoral support for a student or making alternative arrangements for their supervision and/or teaching.

- 4.8 Usually, the protective measures will avoid conflicts of interest by ensuring the staff member ceases to have or does not acquire any contact with the student. In practice, this may involve any of the following:
- a) consulting with both the member of staff and the student to identify any impact their relationship may have within the UCO;
  - b) re-organising the staff member's duties to ensure they are not teaching, supervising, tutoring, mentoring, assessing, examining, providing welfare/pastoral support, or participating in the administration or management of any activities in which the student is involved;
  - c) taking action to minimise the potential effect of the relationship on other staff or students;
  - d) the staff member withdrawing from writing references and recommendations or being involved in any decision concerning admissions, academic awards/prizes, scholarships, or bursaries for the student in question.
- 4.9 In no circumstances may a member of staff who has, or has had, an intimate relationship with a student, take on, or continue in, any supervisory or tutoring role for them, even if the relationship predated the introduction of this policy and has been declared within two months of the policy commencement date.

## 5. Advice to Students

- 5.1 Students should note the requirements of this policy for members of staff (see Section 4).
- 5.2 If an intimate or close personal relationship has developed contrary to this policy, even if it predates the policy commencement date, the student is encouraged to disclose it to their Course Leader and to a member of the UCO student welfare team.
- 5.3 Students should contact immediately Student Support for guidance and support available in any cases of non-consensual behaviour.
- 5.4 Messages or other behaviours towards members of staff that could be interpreted as flirtatious or making advances towards an intimate relationship will usually (save in trivial cases) need to be reported by the staff member to the line manager or HR Team. This may result in protective measures to separate affected parties or minimise the possibility of conflicts of interest, complaints or questions over academic integrity or professional behaviour.
- 5.5 Non-exhaustive examples of trivial cases include a student who spontaneously hugs their supervisor upon being told they have received an academic prize or a student who submits written work by email/online with the message 'love xxx' or similar as they use such informality for most communications or used the sign-off message in error. Examples of cases which are not trivial and need to be declared



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include a student who suggests a 'date' or one who sends a gift which suggests overtures towards an intimate relationship (e.g., Valentine's card/present).

- 5.6 Students should note that any behaviour that constitutes harassment (towards a staff member or a fellow student) may be the subject of disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct & Disciplinary Policy.