

Name of Document:	Relations between staff and students (or between staff) Policy
Responsible area:	Student Experience and Wellbeing
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DGHE aims to provide a working and learning environment that enables staff and students to fulfil their personal potential in a safe, inclusive, and equitable community. DGHE is committed to the creation and maintenance of a supportive and respectful environment. It is recognised that in a healthy academic community, staff and students may develop mutually respectful professional relationships. However, personal or intimate relationships between staff and students carry significant risks of real or perceived conflicts of interest and potential abuse of power.

DGHE recognises that the risks of exploitation in staff–student relationships are not one-sided. While staff may hold positional authority, students may also seek to exert undue influence or take advantage of staff. This policy therefore aims to protect both staff and students from any form of coercion, manipulation, or abuse arising from personal relationships

In line with Office for Students (OfS) Statement of Expectations (E6), DGHE has strengthened this policy to make a significant and credible difference in protecting students from harassment, sexual misconduct, conflicts of interest, and power imbalances. This version introduces stricter safeguards, mandatory reporting, and enhanced staff/student training.

**This policy covers all personal relationships, including:**

- Business, commercial, or financial relationships
- Close friendships and social relationships
- Family relationships
- Current and former intimate relationships (including marital, sexual, romantic, or emotional relationships regardless of gender or sexuality)

This policy applies to all DGHE staff and students, in all areas where personal relationships could give rise to conflicts of interest, trust, confidentiality, or potential harm, including:

- Management and supervision of staff or students, including career progression, pastoral support, and academic development
- Teaching, learning, and academic assessment
- Deployment of financial or other resources

- Access to confidential information
- Contractual or employment-related matters, including placements, scholarships, complaints, or disciplinary decisions
- Allocation of academic work or facilities to students

## **1. Policy Position on Intimate Personal Relationships**

1.1 To protect students and uphold academic integrity, DGHE prohibits intimate or sexual relationships between staff and any student over whom the staff member has direct or indirect responsibility for teaching, learning, assessment, selection, pastoral care, or research supervision.

1.2 Where a staff member and student already have an intimate personal relationship at the time either party joins DGHE, or where such a relationship develops despite this policy, it is the responsibility of the staff member to declare the relationship immediately to the Head of Centre or senior management representative. Details of the relationship will not be required; only its existence needs to be disclosed.

1.3 DGHE strongly discourages intimate personal relationships between staff and students generally, even where no direct academic or supervisory link exists, due to the inherent risk of perceived power imbalance.

1.4 Failure to declare a relevant relationship may result in disciplinary action for staff and/or the procedures outlined in the Academic Integrity & Misconduct Policy for students.

## **2. Conflict of Interest Management**

To comply with OfS expectations and protect the integrity of DGHE processes, once a relationship is declared:

- The staff member must not have sole responsibility for decisions affecting the student's academic progress, welfare, or assessment.
- The staff member must not be involved in decisions affecting the student's financial support, placement opportunities, disciplinary matters, or other benefits.
- Alternative supervisory or assessment arrangements will be put in place.
- Any involvement of staff in decisions related to salary, workload, promotions, or training of another party in the relationship will be managed by independent oversight.
- A confidential record of the declaration and agreed actions will be maintained by the Head of Centre in line with data protection legislation.

## **3. Mandatory Training and Awareness**

3.1 All staff will be required to adhere to the following:

- Professional boundaries and ethical responsibilities in staff–student relationships
- Managing and declaring conflicts of interest
- Training regarding trauma-informed approaches for responding to disclosures of harassment or sexual misconduct
- Understanding OfS requirements and relevant DGHE policies.

3.2 All students will be required to adhere to the following:

- Mandatory induction sessions on professional boundaries and respectful conduct
- Bystander and witness intervention training to enable them to recognise and respond appropriately to potential misconduct
- Clear guidance on reporting routes (including the online tools and resources made available by DGHE) and available support services

3.3 Refresher materials and awareness campaigns will be delivered through the VLE, email updates, and prominently displayed information on campus.

#### **4. Protection Against Abuse of Power**

4.1 DGHE recognises the inherent power imbalance in staff–student relationships and commits to preventing any misuse of authority or coercion.

4.2 Students or staff who believe they have been disadvantaged due to a personal relationship or conflict of interest may raise their concern through:

- Line manager, personal tutor, or Head of Centre
- Student Complaints Procedure (for students)
- Staff Grievance Procedure (for staff)

4.3 All concerns will be handled with confidentiality, sensitivity, and without victimisation.

#### **5. Reporting and Support**

5.1 DGHE provides a range of support services for students and staff affected by power imbalance, harassment, or sexual misconduct, including:

- Confidential advice from the Bullying & Harassment Adviser
- Use of the ‘SpeakUp’ online reporting tool for anonymous or named reports
- Access to counselling, wellbeing services, and external specialist agencies listed in the Appendix of the Bullying & Harassment Policy
- Academic adjustments and safeguarding measures where appropriate.

5.2 Alleged perpetrators will also be offered appropriate guidance and support to ensure a fair and transparent process.

#### **6. Complaints and Disciplinary Measures**

6.1 If a complaint of abuse of power, harassment, or breach of this policy is substantiated, it may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal for staff or expulsion for students.

6.2 Records of all complaints, investigations, and actions will be maintained by the Head of Centre in accordance with DGHE’s Document Retention and Data Protection policies.

#### **7. Monitoring and Review**

7.1 The Head of Centre will monitor compliance and report annually to the Higher Education Management Team on:

- Number of declarations made
- Training completion rates
- Lessons learned from complaints or grievance cases
- Effectiveness of measures taken to minimise conflicts of interest

7.2 This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it continues to meet OfS expectations and reflect sector best practice.

## **8. Confidentiality and Sensitivity**

8.1 All declarations, complaints, and investigations under this policy will be treated in the strictest confidence and handled with sensitivity to protect the dignity and privacy of all parties involved.