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This guidance supports the Staff and Students Personal Relationships Policy and sets out the expectations of all at the University of Nottingham; this includes staff, alumni, volunteers, associates, casuals and visitors.

In order to maintain a professional relationship with students based on trust, confidence and equal treatment, staff are prohibited from entering into an intimate or sexual relationship with a student for whom they have a direct or indirect professional or pastoral responsibility, or interact with as part of their role within the University.

Staff should, therefore, follow the behaviour guidance below.

**Guidance on acceptable behaviours towards Students** (including undergraduate, postgraduate, students from other HEIs or on a placement).

### **Communications**

- Staff should use a University email account, University telephone, University software and applications for communications with students, particularly where this is one-to-one.
- Staff should give careful consideration before giving their personal mobile phone number, particularly to an undergraduate student. Sometimes it may be unavoidable, for example, when they are arranging and taking part in conferences or organising field trips. University communication channels such as University email or Microsoft Teams could be used as an alternative, but may not always be practicable. Sharing personal phone numbers with students and using alternative communication platforms should always be for communicating regarding University 'work' and not for social reasons.
- It is good practice to follow up any telephone call with a written summary of the conversation to the student's University email account so that there is an auditable trail of any substantive communication and both parties are clear of what was said and agreed.
- Ensure that contact remains during reasonable working hours.
- Set an example by writing and communicating with students in a professional and business style. Any email sent to a student or a colleague about a student may be disclosed to the student or their legal representative, for example under data protection law.
- Consider communication and language avoiding 'banter', recognising that it might be uncomfortable and intimidating to others.

### **Relationships**

- Staff should not enter into friendships with students that may be seen as favouritism or grooming.
- Staff should avoid socialising and drinking with undergraduate students and never away from campus or a non-University event. Where staff are invited to a social event by an undergraduate student, they should discuss this and seek permission to attend from their line manager.
- Staff should consider how and when they socialise with postgraduate students; staff should not socialise with postgraduate students alone and consider the power imbalance in all their interactions.
- Staff should limit the amount of alcohol that they choose to consume in a work-related social setting.

## **Contact**

- Staff should maintain an appropriate physical and emotional distance from students.
- Meeting in an academic's office may be intimidating. Staff may wish to consider meeting in one of the University cafés or meeting rooms. However, ensure that meetings and discussions occur on campus or other University-approved premises only.
- Having open office hours can be good practice in managing the timing and frequency of meetings between colleagues and students.
- Staff should consider how they design their workspace or office to remind that this is a formal place of work or study. It may be appropriate to ensure that there is a desk or table between staff and others who meet in offices.

## **Examples of unacceptable behaviour towards students**

- Physical touching, that could be construed as sexualised (eg touches of the shoulder or squeezes of the leg).
- Any comments or questions of a sexual nature (whether verbally or electronically).
- Any sexual relationship with a student; or sexual harassment of a student.
- Paying undue special attention to a particular student that may be grooming.
- Accepting gifts from a student, unless it is following final assessment completion and deemed to be a minor token of thanks in accordance with the conflicts of interest policy.
- Inviting an individual student to a private home, room or space without others present, or visiting their home or room, including while at conferences, overseas trips, or on placement.
- Asking a student to perform any personal services or work-related duties when not formally employed or engaged by University to do so, for example caring for a child, or to house sit whilst on holidays.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of examples.

### Definitions

#### Abuse of power

Abuse of power is where someone uses their position of power or authority in an unacceptable manner. Abuse of power can take various forms and may include, but is not limited to, grooming, manipulation, coercion, putting pressure on others to engage in conduct they do not feel comfortable with.

#### Adult at risk

An adult at risk is someone over the age of 18 who receives or may need community care services by reason of disability or illness and as a result of those needs, is unable to protect himself or herself against significant harm or exploitation. This can relate to physical, mental or psychological wellbeing or the potential to be drawn into sexual or criminal exploitation and activity.

#### Close personal relationships

A close personal relationship is a relative or close family friend or a relationship where there is financial dependence.

#### Consent to an intimate relationship

Consent is agreeing by choice and having the freedom and capacity to make that choice. The person seeking consent should always take steps to ensure that consent is freely given, that it is informed and recognises that it can be withdrawn at any time.

#### Freedom to consent

A person is free to make a choice if nothing negative would happen to them if they said no. For example, a person is not free to choose if:

- they are being threatened with violence (by the perpetrator and/or by someone else)
- they are being threatened with humiliation
- they believe that the continuation or assessment of their studies, or progression or advancement of their career, will be at risk if they refused
- they are being blackmailed
- there is a significant power imbalance and the party without power feels pressured to continue in the relationship against their will

#### Capacity to consent

Capacity is about whether someone is physically and/or mentally able to make a choice and to understand the consequences of that choice. For example, a person does not have the capacity to give consent if they are asleep or unconscious. A person's capacity to consent may be inhibited by the influence of drugs or alcohol or the presence of a cognitive or learning difficulty, or mental health condition.

#### Grooming

Grooming can be defined as a gradual process that someone in a position of power uses to manipulate someone to do things they may not be comfortable with and to make them less likely to reject or report abusive behaviour. Grooming will initially start as befriending someone and making them feel special and may result in sexual abuse and/or exploitation.

#### Intimate relationships

An intimate relationship is a consensual romantic or sexual relationship, which goes beyond the bounds of a platonic or working relationship. An intimate relationship could be brief and includes a one-off occurrence.

**Position of trust**

Any staff member working closely with children, young people or adults at risk is in a position of trust.

**Power dynamic**

Is the way different people or different groups of people interact with each other and where one of these sides is more powerful than the other one. The use of power need not involve force or the threat of force (coercion). At one extreme, it closely resembles "influence".

**Power imbalances**

Where one holds more power in a relationship and communication, all things are not equal in the relationship.

**Work-related social setting**

Social events arranged in a work context, with colleagues and/or students.