

RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK POLICY

This document sets out the policy for close personal relationships between staff members and other workers at the University, and between staff members and enrolled students.

ORGANISATION: FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY

APPLIES TO: STAFF

POLICY OWNED BY: PEOPLE & CULTURE DEPARTMENT

REQUIRED CONSULTEES: ACADEMIC SERVICES

APPROVED BY: UEB AND THE JOINT CONSULTATION & NEGOTIATION COMMITTEE

DATE APPROVED: THURSDAY, 10 JULY 2025

REVIEW DATE: MONDAY, 10 JULY 2028

RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK POLICY

This document sets out the policy for close personal relationships between staff members and other workers at the University, and between staff members and enrolled students.

1 KEY FACTS

- 1.1** New close personal relationships between staff and enrolled students are not permitted and considered a breach of professional boundaries under the contractual Code of Conduct (see section 8).
- 1.2** Close personal relationships between staff members and other workers at the University have the potential to cause conflicts of interest and other negative consequences. Staff, contractors, agency workers, and partner organisation staff in close personal relationships with other workers at the University should be aware of the conduct requirements set out in this policy and may be required to declare their relationship (see sections 6 & 7).

2 PURPOSE

- 2.1** The University expects staff to behave in an appropriate, professional and responsible manner at work and fulfil their duties diligently and effectively. Close personal relationships at work have the potential to jeopardise this, e.g. through allegations of favouritism, or unequal treatment etc. This policy seeks to balance a staff member's right to a private life with the University's right to protect its interests and take action when close personal relationships either have the potential to, or do, impact upon services.

3 SCOPE

- 3.1** This policy applies to all staff who hold a contract of employment with the university or are engaged in the capacity of external contractor, agency worker, visiting lecturer or partner.
- 3.2** The policy covers relationships between staff members (and prospective staff members); relationships between staff members and contractors, agency workers, or partner organisation staff; and relationships between staff members and enrolled students.

4 RELATED INFORMATION

- 4.1** The staff Code of Conduct, and Managing Conduct Policy, which are referenced in this document, are available in the Document Library.

5 KEY DEFINITIONS

- 5.1** Close personal relationships are defined as individuals who are:
- close friends (i.e. know each other personally and socialise)
 - related by blood, marriage or civil partnership
 - co-habiting
 - considered a dependent of the other
 - involved in a romantic or intimate relationship.

6 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STAFF MEMBERS

- 6.1** It is recognised that the University is a large employer within the local community, meaning it is likely that some staff members will be related to one another or develop close personal relationships during their employment. If this occurs it is expected that staff will conduct themselves in line with this policy and ensure their behaviour does not adversely affect the University, or its mission, vision and values, including whilst away on University business or outside of working hours.
- 6.2** The University does not find close relationships acceptable where there is a direct line management / supervisory relationship between the staff members or where one of the involved staff members is a senior manager within the department e.g. Head of Department. This is due to the potential for this to create perceptions or the conditions for potential claims of favoritism or unequal treatment to exist, e.g. via PDR's, signing off timesheets, approving or declining annual leave, managing staff or student complaints or other formal processes etc. Where it is identified that the relationship has or could have an adverse effect on the work of one or both staff members, a discussion with a more senior manager should take place to identify an agreeable solution, e.g. one staff member agreeing to be aligned to a different line manager. Where there is no alternative way of working, the manager should seek an alternative team/position for one of the staff members involved.
- 6.3** Where close personal relationships exist within the same team, those staff members should ensure that this does not result in feelings of exclusion or create conflict for others within the team. Staff are encouraged to bring to the attention of their line manager any difficulties they are experiencing in maintaining such professional boundaries.
- 6.4** Relationships between staff members in different teams does not in itself constitute a concern. However, staff are still expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to deal sensitively with any confidential information they may have access to within their duties.
- 6.5** If a close personal relationship breaks down, the staff members involved should ensure that there are no acts that could be reasonably interpreted as arguments or disagreements at work.
- 6.6** Displaying any obvious signs of affection at work in the presence of others is strongly discouraged. Intimacy in the workplace is not permitted.
- 6.7** The University discourages the employment of staff with close personal relationships when they are employed together in an area which is involved in key decisions on behalf of the University, e.g. People & Culture, External Funding Office, Finance etc. This is to ensure that our staff and students feel confident that advice and decisions are fair and equitable when they are based on the application of independent professional judgement.
- 6.8** Staff should not be involved in the job description or evaluation request of any staff member with whom they have a close personal relationship, this includes not being responsible for decisions relating to the promotion, progression, spine point arrangements, and the contract of employment or pay of the other staff member.

- 6.9** Staff members must declare a potential or perceived conflict of interest as soon as they are approached to participate in employment related proceedings, e.g. as a facilitator, witness, investigator or hearing chair etc. Staff members should not be (save for as a witness) involved in any investigation, formal meeting/hearing or other decisions involving the other staff member with whom they have a close personal relationship.
- 6.10** Where one staff member in a close personal relationship is subject to investigation under any of the organisation's procedures, related discussions will remain confidential to that staff member. The other staff member involved in the close personal relationship may attend meetings to provide support, but may not intervene, speak on behalf of or represent the other staff member.
- 6.11** In situations where one staff member in a close personal relationship or former close personal relationship raises a grievance against the other, consideration should be given to the temporary redeployment of one of the staff members whilst the investigation and/or hearing takes place.
- 6.12** Staff members involved in the recruitment to internal and external vacancies must ensure that the decision to appoint is made in line with the Recruitment and Selection Policy. Any staff member with a close personal relationship with an applicant should not be involved at any stage of the recruitment and selection process. If a staff member becomes aware that there is an application from someone with whom they have a close personal relationship they must declare this to the Recruitment Team and withdraw from the process.
- 6.13** Similarly, a staff member who has a close personal relationship with another should not act as a referee for them if they are a candidate for either internal or external positions.

7 RELATIONSHIPS WITH CONTRACTORS, AGENCY WORKERS AND PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

- 7.1** A close personal relationship between a staff member and a contractor or a staff member within a partner organisation is not acceptable if it compromises or has the potential to compromise, the staff member's position of trust or the professional standards expected in their position; or where it represents a conflict of interests, eg. where both staff members are involved in tendering, awarding contracts or engaged in funding activity for each other's organisation. Staff are encouraged to bring to the attention of their respective line manager any difficulties they are experiencing in managing such professional boundaries.
- 7.2** It is the responsibility of the manager arranging the assignment to require agency workers and contractors to declare whether they have a close personal relationship with any existing staff member, before they engage their services.

8 RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

- 8.1** Staff members must not engage in new close personal relationships with enrolled students, regardless of their age. If this type of relationship develops the situation could be regarded as an abuse of the staff member's position of trust, the professional

standards expected in their role, and represent a conflict of interest. Any such conduct may be subject to disciplinary action.

- 8.2** In cases where close personal relationships precede the enrollment of one party as a student, it is the responsibility of the staff member to inform their line manager that such a relationship exists. The line manager will discuss the situation with the staff member and agree an appropriate course of action and the situation should be regularly discussed to explore any potential conflicts. It may be appropriate for the student to be taught/assessed by another staff member. The staff member is not permitted to access the respective students' academic or personal records, without advance written permission from both their line manager and the student.

9 RAISING CONCERNS

- 9.1** Any staff member who believes that a close personal relationship is adversely affecting their employment, the functioning of the team, or the provision of services is encouraged to share their concerns at the earliest opportunity with their line manager or more senior manager if they prefer. Where a staff member is not comfortable with either of these options they may consider raising their concerns to a member of staff from People & Culture or their Trade Union representative. This also applies to staff members in a close personal relationship.

10 CONFIDENTIALITY

- 10.1** Wherever possible confidentiality regarding the existence of a close personal relationship will be maintained. However, should disclosure be deemed necessary, this will be done in consultation with the staff members and their line manager. If alternate working practices are required, it may be necessary to inform other members of the team regarding these arrangements and the reasons for them.

11 BREACHES OF POLICY

- 11.1** Alleged breaches of this policy will be investigated under the Managing Conduct Policy or other relevant policy or procedure. Any failure to disclose a close personal relationship which leads to a potential or actual financial loss to the organisation may also be considered in line with the Fraud Act 2006. Staff have the right to appeal against any formal action taken under this policy using the HR Appeals Procedure.

12 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 12.1** The author has checked [here](#) to confirm whether an Equality Impact Assessment is required and confirms that:

- ☒ An Equality Impact Assessment is **not required**.
- ☐ An Equality Impact Assessment **is required and has been completed**.

13 CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- 13.1** For further information about this policy, please contact peoplehub@falmouth.ac.uk with details of your enquiry, which will be directed to a relevant member of the People & Culture Department.