

Policy on Relationships between Staff and Students

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Policy on Relationships between Staff and Students

1. Scope and purpose of the policy

- 1.1 This policy outlines the university's position on relationships between members of staff and students at Queen Mary. It is intended to ensure that the staff-student relationship is one that is founded on mutual trust, confidence and respect.
- 1.2 In the context of this document, a **personal** relationship is defined as:
- a family relationship; or
 - a business/commercial/financial relationship; or
 - a sexual/romantic relationship.
- 1.3 A **professional** relationship is defined as:
- an assessing, supervising, tutoring, mentoring, teaching role; or
 - a pastoral role; or
 - a collaboration on a project for the university; or
 - an administrative or technical support role.

2. Relationships between staff and students

- 2.1 Queen Mary believes the professional relationship between a student and a member of staff is a central part of the student's educational experience at the university.
- 2.2 The difference in 'power' between a teacher and student, or a supervisor and student, makes these relationships potentially vulnerable to exploitation. They also generate real or perceived inequalities, not only involving the persons concerned, but also affecting other members of the university, whether students or staff. It is vital that the staff-student relationship is one of trust, confidence and respect in order that all students can benefit from the learning experience. It is also vital that students benefit from equality of treatment and so it is important that a personal relationship between a member of staff and a student does not in any way prejudice that equality, in reality or perception.
- 2.3 Accordingly, members of staff at Queen Mary are strongly discouraged from entering into a personal relationship with any student whom they are responsible for assessing, supervising, tutoring, mentoring, teaching or to whom they provide pastoral care or administrative and/or technical support. This includes members of staff who are also students themselves, such as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). Similarly staff should declare, to their Head of School (for Academics) or Faculty Operating Officer/Director (for Professional Services), an existing professional and/or familial relationship with a student.
- 2.4 Should a personal relationship already exist when the member of staff or student enters the university or develops while the student is registered at Queen Mary, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to declare their involvement as soon as possible

to their Head of Department or their HR Partner who will liaise with the Head of Department.

- 2.5 With regard to students who are under 18 (e.g. summer school) or an adult in need of safeguarding, only relationships of a professional or familial nature are permitted and acceptable as this would be considered a safeguarding risk and as such any allegations would be considered as gross misconduct under the university's disciplinary policy. (Please see clause 6.3 below regarding Safeguarding).

3. Procedure for declaring a personal relationship

- 3.1 Although the university regards it as unprofessional for any staff member to actively seek to initiate a personal relationship or to pursue such a relationship with a student without regard to the problems which may ensue, it also recognises that such relationships may none the less develop. Where a member of staff has a professional role in relation to a student with whom they have a personal or familial relationship, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform their Head of School (for Academic) or Faculty Operating Officer/Director (for Professional Services) in order that teaching, tutoring, assessment, administrative or any other arrangements can be adjusted and monitored appropriately. Heads of Department will ensure that the professional relationship between the parties is either ended, modified or reduced in order to ensure there is no threat to the integrity to either party. In respect of a familial relationship, it should be noted that this may just be coincidental and, as such, perfectly acceptable in certain situations.

- 3.2 Also, while not a bar to employment with Queen Mary, applicants for employment will be asked to declare any personal relationship, as defined in this policy, with existing members of colleagues, students, or members of Council.

- 3.3 Undergraduate students are, in general, the most vulnerable members of the university community. Accordingly:

- Personal relationships between academic/teaching or professional services, including GTAs, and undergraduates are very strongly discouraged.
- In any case, the member of staff in question should as soon as possible inform their Head of Department, normally in writing, and withdraw from all teaching and assessment of the relevant undergraduate module.
- The member of staff in question should withdraw from writing references and recommendations for the student in question.

- 3.4 Graduate students are vulnerable too, not least because they are at a point in their academic careers when the good opinion of their supervisors and teachers may be vital. Accordingly:

- Relationships between academic/teaching staff and graduate students (PGR and PGT) are very strongly discouraged, especially between a supervisor and a graduate supervisee.
- If such a relationship occurs between a member of staff and a graduate student their Head of Department should be informed as soon as possible, normally in writing.
- The member of staff should withdraw from supervising the student, and from writing letters of recommendation for them.

- 3.5 Details of the course of action to be adopted will be agreed in writing between the Head of Department and the individual(s) concerned. All information and disclosures made under this policy will be treated in confidence and in accordance with the university's legal obligations to include the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- 3.6 Should a Head of School (for Academic) or Faculty Operating Officer/Director (for Professional Services) be made aware of a relationship likely to be covered by this policy, it is their responsibility to initiate the appropriate measures; taking account of any responsibilities the individual has outside of their home School/Institute or Department. The actions taken by Head of School or Faculty Operating Office/Director should be in consultation with the Director of Human Resources and the Lead Safeguarding Officer.
- 3.7 Failure on the part of a member of staff to promptly declare the existence of a personal relationship with a student in accordance with the requirements of this policy and which results in the academic, administrative or institutional activities of the university being brought into question; may result in disciplinary action being taken.

4. Further support

- 4.1 Students who are concerned about a relationship with a member of staff are urged at the earliest opportunity to consult their Personal Tutor/Academic Advisor, Student Support Officer, Senior Tutor or the Head of School (for Academics) or Faculty Operating Officer/Director (for Professional Services).
- 4.2 Students may also seek support outside of their Department by contacting the Advice and Counselling Service or the Academic Advice service in the Students' Union. Students who are concerned about a relationship that may raise a safeguarding concern can also contact their designated Faculty Safeguarding Officer.
- 4.3 Staff who are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship should seek guidance from their Head of Department/Line Manager or local HR Partner, who may inform their Head of Department/Line Manager; in accordance with the intention of this policy.

5. Guidance on harassment, bullying and discrimination

- 5.1 QMUL is dedicated to creating a safe, welcoming, inclusive and diverse community, which allows staff and students to thrive without fear of any form of harassment, or bullying. The [Dignity at QMUL Statement](#) reflects the core values that shape and influence the life of our institution, and describes our zero tolerance approach to all forms of behaviour from staff, students or visitors that might violate the dignity of others.
- 5.2 If a student is unsure whether a relationship with a member of staff could be defined as harassment or bullying, they are encouraged to act promptly and seek guidance from any of the following support services: Student Support Officer (within the academic school), QMSU Academic Advice Centre or the Advice and Counselling Service.

6. Reporting breaches or raising complaints

6.1 Guidance on definitions are available in a [separate university document](#) and for students, how to report various allegations of harassment, bullying or discrimination is available:

<http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/media/arcs/policyzone/QMUL-Complaints-Policy-June-2015.pdf>

6.2 Any allegations made by a student who has been classified as an 'adult in need of safeguarding' (as defined in paragraph 2.5 above) will be investigated as gross misconduct, in conjunction with the university's disciplinary policy.

6.3 The university's safeguarding policy can be accessed at:

<http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/media/arcs/policyzone/Safeguarding-Policy-and-procedures-Jan2016-Approved-by-QMSE.pdf>

6.4 It is incumbent upon all members of QMUL to raise concerns or disclose information in the public interest (whistle-blowing) which may relate to improper conduct or unethical behaviour. Information on how to do so can be accessed at:

<http://hr.qmul.ac.uk/procedures/policies/pid/>

7. Further support contact details

7.1 A list of Student Support Officers based in academic schools can be found at:

<http://my.qmul.ac.uk/services-and-support/student-support-contacts/>

7.2 The Advice and Counselling Service can be contacted through the following ways:

- In person at the reception on the ground floor of the Geography Building between 9.30am and 4.30pm Monday-Friday;
- Online via <https://www.welfare.qmul.ac.uk/about-us/opening-times-and-contact-us/#contactus>;
- By telephone on 020 7882 2717.

7.3 A list of Safeguarding Officers and contact details can be found at:

<http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/policy/safeguarding/>

7.4 The QMSU Academic Advice Service can be contacted through the **Advocacy & Representative Manager**, whose contact details are at the bottom of the webpage in the link below:.

<https://www.qmsu.org/advice/academic/>