

# Relationships Involving Colleagues, Students and Close Personal or Business Associates

2022 - 2025



Edge Hill  
University

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## Summary

*This policy does not form part of employee's contracts of employment and may be reviewed and amended subject to agreement by relevant parties.*

*This policy must be read in conjunction with the Code of Practice which overarches all the University's policies and procedures and details generic aspects that apply to all of our policies and procedures*

## Introduction

This policy has been designed to set out the University's expectations and requirements regarding relationships between members of the University community.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to members of the EHU community in circumstances where personal relationships have the potential to overlap with professional relationships. In providing such guidelines the University seeks to protect the interests and the integrity of all colleagues and students from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interests, to safeguard professional relationships and to work together to protect colleagues and students against inappropriate behaviour.

### **Our vision and values**

Edge Hill University aims to provide a supportive working and learning environment which enables colleagues and students to fulfil their full potential, thereby enhancing and enriching the lives and experiences of all those who come into contact with the University.

The University and its community subscribe to the following values:

- act responsibly and with integrity
- work together to deliver our Vision.

In addition to this, the University has legal responsibility to [safeguard children](#) (i.e. those under the age of 18) and adults who may be considered vulnerable.

# 1. Scope

Edge Hill University firmly believes that consensual relationships between adults are a private matter between the adults concerned and that the University does not seek to regulate people's personal lives. Nevertheless, the University also recognises that for the protection of colleagues and students, the boundaries of the professional role must also be fully recognised and respected. Furthermore, in a minority of cases, serious issues may arise out of personal relationships in a place of work and study if not managed appropriately, for example:

- Conflict of interest
- Subjective and unfair recruitment decisions
- Preferential and inconsistent treatment
- Confidential breaches
- Inappropriate behaviours
- Bullying and harassment

Therefore, the University has a legitimate interest in ensuring robust guidelines are in place to protect its stakeholders from potential allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest, and to limit circumstances where a position of power may be abused. In doing so, the University seeks to ensure a positive and supportive working environment where all people are treated fairly.

In this guidance, the term 'relationship' can be understood to mean the following:

- Family relationships or Intimate relationships
- Pecuniary relationships (i.e. Financial / Monetary / Commercial)
- Contractual relationships
- Close personal relationships

In addition to the guidance found in this document, it is important to note that the University has robust policies in place to address complaints of bullying, harassment & hate crime (see [here](#)).

## **Conflict of interest, exploitation, favouritism or bias**

All members of the EHU community are asked to take reasonable steps to prevent circumstances in which a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality, exploitation, favouritism or unfair advantage gained (or perceived to be gained) may arise.

For additional clarity, the following are some specific examples of circumstances in which a potential conflict and/or a power imbalance might occur as a result of a close personal relationship in a place of work and study:

- Relationships in which one individual is expected to discharge their teaching or supervisory responsibility for the other, whether or not they are paid for their services (e.g., including honorary staff and emeriti). Due to the potential for conflict of interest, exploitation, favouritism or bias, such relationships may undermine the integrity of the supervision or evaluation provided, or may have adverse effects on the working and learning environment for those directly involved, as well as for the broader team and departmental culture;
- Relationships in which one party is in a position to evaluate the work or influence the career of the other may also provide grounds for complaint when that relationship gives undue access or advantage, restricts opportunities, or simply creates a perception of these problems.

## 2. Relationships between Colleagues and Students (Including Research Degree Students).

### **The Safety of boundaries**

The relationship between colleagues and students is one which should be characterised by professionalism, trust, confidence, and fair objective treatment.

Universities UK have issued guidance to all HE organisations (see [here](#)) which recommends that close personal relationships between staff and students in higher education should be strongly discouraged and that where relationships do happen, the staff member should declare this and be removed from all responsibilities which could mean a conflict of interest.

### **Conflict or perceived conflict of interest requires disclosure**

When there has been, or is, a relationship between a colleague and a student, which might lead to an actual or perceived conflict of interest or to a concern that the academic integrity of Edge Hill University processes might be called into question, each party is asked to declare it.

### **Responsibility of the colleague to disclose**

It is the responsibility of staff to declare the potential for a conflict of interest to an appropriate manager (e.g., line manager or senior manager) in a timely manner. Observing the requirements of confidentiality, the manager will consult with the colleague and the student to ensure appropriate steps are taken, e.g., the student's work to be assessed fairly and objectively and to ensure that the colleague is not able to take decisions affecting the student.

## Student disclosures

In the event of a consensual relationship between a student and a colleague, the student is encouraged to declare their involvement to an appropriate colleague e.g. their Personal Tutor or Head of Department. Any student who needs guidance, support or who is concerned about the potential for a conflict of interest in such circumstances should contact Student Services, the Academic Registrar or the Students' Union Academic and Welfare Officer.

### 3. Relationships between members of staff.

Relationships between members of staff are not prohibited. Nevertheless, in order to prevent potential abuse of power or perceived or real conflict of interest, staff are asked to declare close personal or intimate relationships in the following situations:

- Where a relationship begins that may give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest, exploitation, favouritism or bias
- Where a relationship already exists, and a new situation arises that may give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest, exploitation, favouritism or bias.

In such circumstances, it is the responsibility of the staff member to make a declaration to an appropriate manager (e.g., line manager, appropriate senior manager or Human Resources) in a timely manner. Observing the requirements of confidentiality, the declaration should be handled sensitively and respectfully. Any member of staff who needs further support or guidance can contact Human Resources or their HR Partner directly.

### 4. Relationships where there is a business, pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest.

- Pecuniary interests** include personal financial interests, such as investments and/or contracts
- Non-pecuniary interests** are 'private or personal interests' that commonly arise out of family or personal relationship, or involvement in sporting, social or other cultural groups and associations.

Colleagues and governors are required to disclose pecuniary interests whether direct or indirect in any contract with which the University is concerned. In particular: - If it comes to the knowledge of a member of staff or governor that a contract in which they, or their family or close associates, have any pecuniary interest, whether direct or indirect, has been, or is proposed to be, entered into by the University, they shall, as soon as possible, give notice, in writing, to the DVC of their interest therein, or to the Director of Finance in the first instance.

There may also be circumstances that arise where disclosure of non-pecuniary

interests may need to be disclosed in areas where relationships might be seen to influence judgements and convey the impression of personal motive. Clearly, this can give rise to potential conflicts of interest and again, in the event of uncertainty, these should be referred to the DVC as soon as possible, or alternatively to the Director of Finance in the first instance.

By registering and declaring interests, individuals are ensuring that other people involved in decision making know from the outset that there could be a potential conflict of interest and can ensure that the individual concerned takes no part in the process. If a staff member requires further guidance or advice in relation to the above, they should contact the Finance Department directly.

## 5. Potential risks

To provide additional clarity, the risks associated with potential conflicts of interest, though not exhaustive, may arise in relation to the following:

- Management, supervision, career progression and development of colleagues
- Contractual matters
- Deployment of resources
- All aspects of teaching, learning and assessment
- Access to and management of confidential information
- Access to support services, including financial assistance, accommodation and other services
- Assignment of work or other facilities or benefits to colleagues or students.

### **Important notes**

- Under the Sexual Offenders Act 2003, it is illegal to have a sexual relationship with a student under the age of 18.
- Failure to declare any conflict of interest in an appropriate and timely manner, which results in Edge Hill University's academic, administrative or institutional processes being compromised, may result in disciplinary action.
- In order to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding and to maintain a professional relationship, it is recommended that colleagues should not divulge personal information such as home address or telephone numbers to students or socialise with students outside activities arising from their employment at the University.

## End matter

Title	Relationships involving colleagues, students and close personal or business associates
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