

Policy for Relationships between Staff and Students

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1. Scope and purpose of the policy

This policy outlines the university's position on relationships between members of staff and students at King's College London. It is intended to ensure that the staff-student relationship is one that is founded on mutual trust and confidence.

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.

A **professional** relationship is defined as:

- an assessing, supervising, tutoring, mentoring, teaching role; or
- a pastoral role; or
- an administrative or technical support role.

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2. Relationships between staff and students

King's 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.

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 and confidence in order that 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.

Accordingly, members of staff at King's 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 Department a professional relationship with a student with whom they have an existing familial relationship.

Should a personal relationship already exist when the member of staff or student enters the university or develop while the student is registered at King's, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to declare their involvement as soon as possible to their Head of Department or a senior member of the Human Resources team internal.kcl.ac.uk/hr/contact who will liaise with the Head of Department.

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3. Procedure for declaring a personal relationship

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 relationship, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform their Head of Department in order that teaching, tutoring, assessment, administrative or any other arrangements can be adjusted, where necessary, and monitored appropriately. Heads of Department may choose to ensure that the professional relationship between the parties is either ended, modified or reduced in order ensure there is no threat to the integrity to either party.

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

- a. Personal relationships between academic/teaching staff, including GTAs, and undergraduates are very strongly discouraged.
- b. 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 that undergraduate cohort.
- c. The member of staff in question should withdraw from writing references and recommendations for the student in question.

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:

- a. Relationships between academic/teaching staff and graduate students are very strongly discouraged, especially between a supervisor and a graduate supervisee.
- b. 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.
- c. The member of staff should withdraw from supervising the student, and from writing letters of recommendation for them.

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 accordance with the university's obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Should a Head of Department be made aware of a relationship likely to be covered by this policy it is their responsibility to initiate the appropriate measures. The actions taken by the Head of Department should be in consultation with the Director of Human Resources and the Director of Students & Education.

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.

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4. Further support

Students who are concerned about a relationship with a member of staff are urged at the earliest opportunity to consult their personal tutor, their Department Senior Tutor or the Head of Department.

Students may also seek support outside of their Department by contacting the [Student Conduct & Appeals Office](#).

Staff that are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship should seek guidance from their line manager or local [HR Adviser](#) who may inform their Head of Department in accordance with the intention of this policy.

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5. Guidance on harassment, bullying and discrimination

King's College London is committed to providing and promoting a positive working, learning, and social environment for all its students which is free from all forms of prejudice, discrimination, harassment and bullying. The university fully supports the right of all people to be treated with dignity and respect at work and study and will take appropriate steps to achieve this. Harassment, bullying and discrimination can lead to fear, stress and anxiety and may be unlawful. The university finds any form of such behaviour unacceptable.

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 one of the following:

Staff and students can contact the university's [Harassment Advisers](#).

Undergraduate and taught postgraduate students can also contact the [Student Conduct & Appeals Office](#).

Postgraduate Research students can contact their Vice Deans. Further contact details can be found on the university's [intranet](#).

Students seeking help with the university's regulations and procedures can contact KCLSU Advice Service by email at advice@kclsu.org or by telephone on 020 7848 1588.

Guidance on defining and reporting allegations of harassment, bullying or discrimination for students is available on the university's [intranet](#).

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Policy Owner: Director of Human Resources