
Intimate and Close Personal Relationships Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to establish the expected standards of behaviour relating to Intimate and Close Personal Relationships at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington (the University). It also sets out the processes to follow when Members of the University Community have an Intimate or Close Personal Relationship with a Student or another Member of the University Community.

2. Application of Policy

This Policy applies to all Members of the University Community. For clarity, this Policy relates to Students in that it sets out the expectations regarding appropriate standards of behaviour of other Members of the University Community when those individuals are interacting with Students. Where a particular individual is both a Student and a Staff Member (for example, as a Tutor, Research Assistant or Residential Adviser), this Policy will apply to that individual for the duration of their employment as a Staff Member.

Policy Content

3. General

3.1 The University is committed to fostering an environment where Members of the University Community behave in a respectful, impartial, and transparent way that demonstrates sensitivity to actual or perceived power imbalances. To this end, the University seeks to:

- (a) establish the circumstances when an Intimate Relationship between a Member of the University Community and a Student is prohibited;
- (b) set out the expected standards of behaviour of Members of the University Community, including to act with respect, responsibility, integrity, and kaitiakitanga, which align with the University's values;
- (c) encourage an environment where people feel supported to report relationships in accordance with this Policy and the [Conflicts of Interest Statute](#);
- (d) ensure that appropriate safeguards and processes are in place to prevent Abuse of Power and Sexual Harassment (as defined in the [Sexual Harassment Response Policy](#));
- (e) protect Members of the University Community from allegations of actual or perceived Conflicts of Interest, and to limit circumstances where an Abuse of Power could occur. In doing so, it seeks to ensure a positive and supportive working environment where everyone is treated fairly; and
- (f) ensure that the provisions of this Policy are consistent with [Te Tiriti o Waitangi Statute](#), the [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Framework](#), and other related University Policies.

4. Standards of behaviour

4.1 Members of the University Community are in a position of trust and must maintain high standards of behaviour and appropriate conduct in relation to the activities that they undertake (which may include activities in person, online or over the phone).

- 4.2 The University recognises that socialising on a platonic basis between Members of the University Community and Students, or between colleagues, is often a positive aspect of life at the University. It is also acknowledged that appropriate personal relationships can form in circumstances where there is no opportunity for an Abuse of Power.

5. Power imbalances

- 5.1 The nature of the relationships within the University when there is a power imbalance imposes important responsibilities and duties. There is potential for an actual or perceived Abuse of Power in any Intimate or Close Personal Relationships between individuals in inherently unequal positions where one individual has authority over the other in the context of their teaching, supervision, direct responsibilities related to the emotional safety and well-being of a Student, or other work. Examples at the University include, but are not limited to, a teacher, examiner, or supervisor and their Student; a Tutor and Students in their tutorials; a supervisor and postgraduate Student or Research Assistant; Staff Members in a Hall of Residence and Students; or a Manager and a Staff Member in their reporting line. This list is not exhaustive.
- 5.2 Due to the potential for exploitation, favouritism, bias (real or perceived) or Conflicts of Interest, such relationships may undermine the integrity of the supervision or evaluation provided. Such relationships may have adverse effects on the working, learning, and living environment or on the emotional safety and well-being of those directly involved, as well as on the broader team culture.

6. Relationships between Members of the University Community and Students

- 6.1 The University **prohibits** Members of the University Community from initiating, entering into and/or being in an Intimate Relationship with a Student where:
- (a) they have a direct responsibility for, or involvement in, that Student's academic studies, and/or:
 - (b) they are assigned specific direct responsibilities related to the emotional safety and wellbeing of the Student.
- 6.2 This includes a relationship with any Student where it is reasonably foreseeable that the Member of the University Community will be moving into a role of direct responsibility for that Student in the course their studies. Direct responsibility includes direct management, teaching or supervision (including, for example, as a Tutor or Teaching Fellow) and assessing the Student's work. It also encompasses any roles where a Member of the University Community is assigned specific direct responsibility related to the emotional safety and well-being of the Student (including, for example, as a Residential Adviser or a casual Staff Member).
- 6.3 If a Member of the University Community is already in a pre-existing Intimate Relationship with another person at the time that person becomes a Student covered by clause 6.1, they must declare the relationship to their Manager, or a member of the Human Resources advisory team (i.e. an HR Manager or HR Adviser) as soon as they become aware of the circumstances. This is so appropriate arrangements can be made to meet the needs of the Student and the broader University community, in accordance with the [Conflicts of Interest Statute](#) and the [Procedures for Managing Conflicts of Interest](#).
- 6.4 Close Personal Relationships of a non-intimate nature can still give rise to real or perceived Conflicts of Interest and are dealt with under the [Conflicts of Interest Statute](#) and the [Procedures for Managing Conflicts of Interest](#).
- ## **7. Isolated intimate encounters**
- 7.1 If a Member of the University Community has an isolated, consensual, intimate encounter with another person and later discovers that the person is a Student covered by clause 6.1, they must

immediately report the matter to their Manager, or a member of the Human Resources advisory team (i.e. an HR Manager or HR Adviser) as soon as they become aware of the circumstances. Any such report should include the Student's name and that there may be a Conflict of Interest, so that appropriate arrangements can be made to meet the needs of the Student and the broader University community, in accordance with the [Conflicts of Interest Statute](#) and the [Procedures for Managing Conflicts of Interest](#). Further details of the facts giving rise to the potential Conflict of Interest will not usually need to be provided. Early reporting may be taken into account when decisions are being made about how to manage the issue.

- 7.2 A file note of a report (including the disclosure and the steps taken in relation to it) will be made pursuant to this clause and the [Procedures for Managing Conflicts of Interest](#). Once any potential Conflict of Interest and wellbeing issues have been addressed, any additional documentation with or relating to the report (other than this file note) will be promptly destroyed once that information is no longer required.

8. Relationships between Members of the University Community

- 8.1 Intimate relationships between Members of the University Community outside of those described in clause 6.1 are not prohibited, but Members of the University Community are reminded of possible power imbalances within such relationships in certain circumstances.
- 8.2 All Members of the University Community must disclose any actual or potential Conflicts of Interest they identify. Conflicts of Interest and their disclosure are managed in accordance with the [Conflicts of Interest Statute](#) and the associated [Procedures for Managing Conflicts of Interest](#). Failure to disclose a Conflict of Interest could comprise a breach of the [Conflicts of Interest Statute](#) (and therefore may be a breach of the [Staff Conduct Policy](#)).

9. Maintaining professional standards

- 9.1 Where an Intimate Relationship ends, the University expects that all parties will continue to conduct themselves in a professional manner and avoid personal disputes which may impact on the working, or teaching and learning environment, or on other colleagues and students. When a Conflict of Interest has been declared it may also be appropriate for some of the previous measures put in place by the University during the relationship to continue for a period of time, or be adjusted, following the end of the relationship. The Members of the University Community involved will be consulted and required to comply with reasonable actions.

10. Advice available

- 10.1 Students who want any advice regarding an Intimate or Close Personal Relationship with a Member of the University Community should seek advice from the Student Interest and Conflict Resolution team or a Victoria University of Wellington Student's Association (VUWSA) advocate (for independent advice and advocacy), with a support person if they wish.
- 10.2 Members of the University Community who are unsure whether they have an Intimate or Close Personal Relationship with another person that needs to be declared should seek advice from their Manager, Head of School, another Manager at the University, the Employee Advisory and Resolution Service (EARS)—Te Rauawa, Human Resources, or their union (if they are a union member).

11. Breaches

- 11.1 Any alleged breach of this Policy will be handled in accordance with the [Staff Conduct Policy](#).
- 11.2 Any person who wishes to report or complain that a Member of the University Community has not, or does not appear to have, acted in accordance with this Policy can do so. The processes for reporting a disclosure or making a complaint where sexual harassment may have occurred are set out in the University's [Sexual Harassment Response Policy](#) and associated [Procedure](#). The

process for making a complaint to the University in other circumstances where a breach of this Policy is suspected are set out in the University's [Guidelines for Addressing Alleged Misconduct](#). Any complaint raising allegations about a suspected breach of this Policy will be handled in accordance with the [Guidelines for Addressing Alleged Misconduct](#).

12. Privacy

- 12.1 The University's [Privacy Policy](#) and [Privacy Notice](#) apply to any personal information collected under this Policy. All information provided under this Policy must be handled sensitively by the recipient of that information, with due regard to the privacy rights of all the individuals concerned. A Manager who receives a declaration or a report under this Policy may seek guidance on the handling of that information from Human Resources and/or the University's Privacy Officer.

Note: The University's Privacy Officer is the General Counsel.

13. Definitions

In this Policy, unless the context otherwise requires:

Abuse of Power	refers to situations 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 that they do not feel comfortable with.
Close Personal Relationships	means a non-intimate relationship but which is of a nature where the connection goes beyond a casual acquaintance. Without limiting the types of relationships, examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relatives or close family friends • a relationship of financial dependence • sharing a domestic living arrangement (e.g. a flatting situation).
Conflict of Interest	has the meaning given in the Conflicts of Interest Statute .
Grooming	refers to a gradual process that someone in a position of power uses to manipulate someone to do things that 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	means a consensual romantic or sexual relationship. An Intimate Relationship could be brief and includes a one-off or sporadic occurrence.
Manager	means any Staff Member of the University with management responsibilities.
Members of the University Community	means Staff Members, independent contractors, adjunct and visiting staff, visiting scholars and

	interns, professors emeriti, volunteers, and any other persons providing services to the University. In the context of this Policy, it does not include Students (unless they are also a Staff Member, or other type of Member of the University Community set out above, at the time).
Sexual Harassment	has the meaning given in the Sexual Harassment Response Policy .
Staff Member	means an employee of the University.
Student	means a person enrolled in any course or programme offered by the University, including those studying at the University under an exchange agreement with another institution, and includes a resident in a Hall of Residence.

Related Documents and Information

14. Related Documents

[Education and Training Act 2020](#)
[Employment Relations Act 2000](#)
[Education \(Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners\) Code of Practice 2021](#)
[Privacy Act 2020](#)
[Victoria University of Wellington Act 1961](#)

[Conflicts of Interest Statute](#)
[Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Framework](#)
[Guidelines for Addressing Alleged Misconduct](#)
[Procedures for Managing Conflicts of Interest](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)
[Sexual Harassment Response Policy](#)
[Sexual Harassment Response Procedure](#)
[Staff Conduct Policy](#)
[Te Tiriti o Waitangi Statute](#)

[Privacy Notice](#)

15. Document Management and Control

Essential Record

Approver	Tumu Whakarae – Vice-Chancellor
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Policy Sponsor	Tumu Maruaia – Provost Toi Pūmanawa – Director, People & Capability
Policy Owner	Manager, Employment Law & Employment Relations

Modification History

Date	Approval Agency	Details
11 March 2025	General Counsel	Minor amendment
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