
Intimate and Close Personal Relationships Policy

1. Purpose

- (a) Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington (“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 unequal degrees of power.
- (b) The purpose of this policy is to establish the expected standards of behaviour and the processes to be followed 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

- (a) This policy is a University-wide policy which applies to all members of the University community. In relation to students, for the sake of clarity, this policy relates to students only insofar as it sets out the expectations that are on other members of the University community regarding the appropriate standards of behaviour when those individuals are dealing 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.

3. Policy content

3.1 *Standards of behaviour*

- (a) Members of the University community are in a position of trust. It is important that high standards of behaviour are always maintained and that due consideration is given to what is appropriate conduct in relation to the activities that they are undertaking.
- (b) 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.
- (c) The nature of the relationships within the University when there is a power imbalance, as defined in paragraph 3.2 below, does impose important responsibilities and duties. This policy is intended to ensure that appropriate safeguards and processes are in place to prevent abuses of power and sexual harassment (as defined in the [Sexual Harassment Response Policy](#)).
- (d) This policy also seeks to protect members of the University community from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest, and to limit circumstances where a position of power may be abused. In doing so, it seeks to ensure a positive and supportive working environment where everyone is treated fairly.

3.2. ***Power imbalances***

- (a) There is potential for an abuse of power or the perception of an 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. At the University, such positions 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.
- (b) 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, or 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.

3.3 ***Relationships between members of the University community and students***

- (a) The University **prohibits** members of the University community from initiating, entering into and/or being in an intimate relationship with a student where the member has a direct responsibility for, or involvement in, that student's academic studies, and/or where the member is assigned specific direct responsibilities related to the emotional safety and well-being of the student. 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, direct teaching or supervision (including as a tutor), assessing the student's work, and all 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 as a residential adviser).
- (b) 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 paragraph 3.3(a) above, the member of the University community 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, so that appropriate arrangements can be made to meet the needs of the student and the broader University community.
- (c) 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 Potential Conflicts of Interest](#).

3.4 ***Isolated intimate encounters***

- (a) 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 paragraph 3.3(a) above, 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, so that appropriate arrangements can be made to meet the needs of the student and the broader University community. Early reporting may be taken into account when decisions are being made about how to manage the issue, including possible action under the [Staff Conduct Policy](#).

3.5 ***Relationships between members of the University community***

- (a) Intimate relationships between members of the University community outside of those described in paragraph 3.3(a) above are not prohibited, but members are reminded of possible power imbalances within such relationships in certain circumstances.

- (b) 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 Potential 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](#)).

3.6 Maintaining professional standards

- (a) Where an intimate relationship ends, it is expected that all parties will continue to conduct themselves in a professional manner within the University and avoid personal disputes which 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 actions put in place by the University during the relationship to continue for a period of time, or to 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.

4. Advice available

- (a) 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 VUWSA advocate (for independent advice and advocacy), with a support person if they wish.
- (b) 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 line manager, head of school, another manager at the University, EARS—Te Rauawa, Human Resources, or the union (if they are a union member).

5. Breach of the policy

- (a) Any alleged breach of this policy will be handled in accordance with the [Staff Conduct Policy](#).
- (b) 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 [Procedures](#). 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](#).

6. Transition for existing relationships

- (a) This policy applies to intimate and close personal relationships formed after the effective date of this policy (stated below). However, there may be such relationships in existence at the time the policy comes into effect.
- (b) Members of the University community must, within one month of the policy effective date, declare any pre-existing intimate or close personal relationships with students (covered by paragraph 3.3(a) above) to their manager, or to the Human Resources advisory team (i.e. an HR manager or HR adviser) in accordance with this policy, and the [Conflicts of Interest Statute](#) and [Procedures for Managing Potential Conflicts of Interest](#).

7. Privacy

- (a) The University's [Privacy Policy](#) applies to any personal information collected under the Intimate and Close Personal Relationships Policy and all information provided under the latter 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

3.3(b), 3.4, 3.5(b), or 6(b) above, and wishes to obtain guidance on the handling of that information, may seek guidance from Human Resources and/or the University's Privacy Officer.

8. Definitions

In this policy, unless the context otherwise requires, the following definitions shall apply:

Abuse of power	Abuse of power is 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	A close personal relationship is a non-intimate relationship but 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).
Grooming	Grooming can be defined as 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	An intimate relationship is a consensual romantic or sexual relationship. An intimate relationship could be brief and includes a one-off or sporadic occurrence.
Manager	Any staff member of the University with management responsibilities.
Members of the University community	All staff members of the University, independent contractors to the University, adjunct and visiting staff, visiting scholars and interns, emeritus professors, volunteers, and any other persons providing services to the University. Note: for the purpose of this policy, this definition does not include students.
Staff member	An employee of the University.
Student	Any person enrolled in a personal course of study at the University, or a person who is studying at the University under an exchange agreement with another institution, and includes a resident in a hall of residence.
University	Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington.

9. Related documents

[Conflicts of Interest Statute](#)

[Procedures for Managing Potential Conflicts of Interest](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Staff Conduct Policy](#)

[Guidelines for Addressing Alleged Misconduct](#)

[Sexual Harassment Response Policy](#)

[Sexual Harassment Response Procedures](#)

[Education and Training Act 2020](#)

[Employment Relations Act 2000](#)

[Privacy Act 2020](#)

10. Document Management and Control

Approver	Vice-Chancellor
Approval Date	12 July 2022
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Review Date	1 September 2023
Sponsor	Provost and Director, People & Capability
Policy Owner	Manager, Employment Law & Employment Relations