**Relationships Policy**

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1. **Introduction** 
   1. **Purpose and Context**

The mission of The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) is to make the discoveries that defeat cancer, and it does this through conducting cancer research to the highest standard, training the next generation of cancer researchers and providing an excellent environment with superior research infrastructure. We seek to attract, retain, motivate and enable the best people to foster a climate of innovation, excellence and collaboration so that ICR’s mission can be successfully delivered.

This policy sets out our organisation's approach to personal relationships at work, and in the educational environment.

We recognise that individuals who work together may form close personal relationships. Personal relationships at work are a normal part of life and you are entitled to a private life. At the same time, we are committed to promoting a working environment based on dignity, trust and respect.

For students, it is intended to ensure that the staff-student relationship is one that is founded on mutual trust and confidence. The Office for Students requires higher education providers to outline steps which could make a significant and credible difference in protecting students from any actual or potential conflict of interest and/or abuse of power, referring specifically to intimate personal relationships between staff and students.

It is important for us to ensure that staff and students behave in an appropriate, professional and responsible manner at work and that any personal relationship does not compromise this.

**1.2** **Scope**

This policy applies to anyone working for us or studying with us. This includes employees, students, workers, contractors, volunteers, interns and apprentices.

The policy does not form part of a contract of employment, and we reserve the right to amend it at any time.

1. **Definitions and Glossary**

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

An **intimate personal relationship** means a relationship that involves one or more of the following elements:

* Physical intimacy including isolated or repeated sexual activity; or
* Romantic or emotional intimacy

Family relationships within this policy are defined as:

* Individuals who are married, or in a partnership or co-habiting arrangement, or dating, or in a sexual/romantic relationship;
* Immediate family members of staff or a student e.g. parents, or son/daughter, or brother/sister, or grandparent/grandchild;
* Other relations of a member of staff or a student e.g. extended family such as aunts/uncles/cousins/nieces/nephews and any other individuals with who there is a close personal relationship e.g. close friendships, business associates etc;

A professional relationship is defined as a relationship between a student and a staff member in one of the following roles:

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

**3.0** **Personal Relationships**

Personal relationships are generally not a matter for the ICR to intervene in. The ICR does, however, have a legitimate need to ensure personal relationships do not result in actual or perceived conflicts of interest or abuses of power. Where personal relationships do exist, the ICR will ensure that professional behaviours are maintained whilst in the workplace and in the educational environment, and that the ICR observes conditions and guidance from the Office for Students.

It is important staff recognise that when in a position of conflicted interests, they may not be aware or able to control subconscious bias in decisions they make. For this reason, you must declare (as per the [Conflicts of Interest guidance](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Tasks/DispForm.aspx?ID=1240)) any relationships which may be a perceived or actual conflict of interest.

The [Over-arching Conflicts of Interest Procedure](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/directorates/CFO/Secretariat/Documents/Conflicts%20of%20interest/ICR%20Conflicts%20of%20Interest%20Procedure%20v8%202%20September%202024.docx) outlines the process for dealing with declarations; in short, your line manager will consider whether the declared interest(s) result in any actual or perceived conflicts of interest. Where they do not, your manager will confirm this to you and make a record. Where they do, your manager will consider mitigations, confirm these to you and make a record.

**With regards to students**, the ICR believes that the professional relationship between a student and a member of staff is a central part of the student’s educational experience at the ICR.

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 institute, 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 the ICR 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.

**3.1** **When might a perceived/actual conflict of interest or abuse of power arise from a personal relationship?**

Although not an exhaustive list, the below examples provide guidance:

* A relationship in which the involved individuals are at differing levels of seniority within the organisation. Particularly when within the chain of line management and/or when one of the individuals has significant control or influence over decisions which affect the other.
* A relationship between a teacher and student, or a supervisor and student.
* Where individuals are assigned financial authority in ICR systems (e.g. for raising or approving purchase orders), and a personal relation also has related access/authority within the same system (i.e. where one individual would submit, and one would approve a transaction);
* A relationship in which the individuals work in opposing parts of a commission/tender process;
* A personal relationship between an applicant and recruitment decision maker;
* A relationship which is likely to be seen to offer an advantage to an individual or disadvantage to another staff member – for example because the status of one individual provides them informal power or influence over decisions which affect the other.

It is not generally necessary to declare a personal relationship between two individuals who have little or no professional contact and where that relationship is unlikely to create an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Wherever you are unsure, however, you should declare and discuss the relationship with your manager to protect yourself from later allegations of failing to declare an interest and/or of abusing a position of power, either of which may be a disciplinary matter.

**3.2** **Relationships within the chain of line management/where one individual has significant influence over decisions affecting the other, or between a teacher and student, or a supervisor and student**

It is recognised that personal relationships can and do develop in these situations. They are not prohibited, but individuals must never be in authority, either directly or indirectly over colleagues with whom they are in a personal relationship without the relationship having been declared and suitable mitigations put in place.

While the ICR 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 nonetheless develop. The relationship must be declared and suitable mitigations put in place, as detailed in ‘[Declaring a Personal Relationship’](#declaration). Under no circumstances can a member of staff continue to supervise or write letters of recommendation for a student with whom they have a personal relationship.

It is vital that you declare such a relationship at the earliest opportunity in order for suitable mitigations to be put in place and to protect yourself from later allegations of failing to declare the interest and/or of abusing a position of power, either of which may be a disciplinary matter. In most instances the strongest onus is on the more senior individual (or individual with greater influence) to recognise the need to declare the relationship and do so.

**3.3** **What are suitable mitigations where a personal relationship is declared?**

Each case should be considered based on the specific facts and circumstances. The key consideration should be how to mitigate risk of perceived or actual bias, conscious or subconscious. Every attempt will be made to take into account the wishes of the individuals concerned with regard to mitigations. In some situations, however, management may enforce a change in order to mitigate a risk. Where an employee disagrees with mitigating actions the procedure set out in the [Over-arching Conflicts of Interest Procedure](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/directorates/CFO/Secretariat/Documents/Conflicts%20of%20interest/ICR%20Conflicts%20of%20Interest%20Procedure%20v8%202%20September%202024.docx) will be followed.

Mitigations may include:

* A change in line management or reporting lines;
* A change in teacher or supervisor;
* Removal of an individual from decision making processes such as, for example, expense approvals or recruitment decisions;
* A change of role or team;
* A change to work pattern or working hours.

**3.4** **Respecting boundaries between professional and personal settings**

Where a personal relationship exists between you and another staff member or student, you must respect the boundaries between personal and professional settings. You must continue to behave in a professional manner whilst at work or representing the ICR, in keeping with the ICR Code of Conduct for students and [ICR Values](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Tasks/DispForm.aspx?ID=790). Equally, personal conflict in a relationship should not be brought into the workplace. Further guidance on this can be obtained from the HR department if needed.

1. **Declaring a Personal Relationship**

If you enter into a personal relationship with a colleague working in the same department/directorate or team, an individual that you supervise, a manager, or with any individual which may give rise to a conflict of interest, you must declare your relationship to your line manager and submit a [Standard Declaration Form](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=ufc4Yeru90ega7kKaS8jjrSeNfjv0hxPsUcCovP1zYVUNExIMlRCTVhFUTUxQTNLQUc2SktUVjlaUi4u).

Where personal relationships are declared, managers will manage the situation sensitively and confidentially; in particular they will be mindful that you may not wish to make your declared relationship public. Managers will not share details of declared relationships with any colleagues other than those who need to be made aware to help manage risks and mitigations.

Any information that you disclose will be treated sensitively and in confidence.

Where a member of staff has a professional role in relation to a student with whom they have declared a personal relationship, steps will be taken to ensure that the professional relationship between the parties is ended, modified or reduced in order ensure there is no threat to the integrity to either party.

Details of the course of action to be adopted will be agreed in writing with the individual(s) concerned. All information and disclosure will be treated in accordance with the ICR’s obligations under data protection legislation.

Should a manager be made aware of a relationship likely to be covered by this policy it is their responsibility to initiate the appropriate measures. The action taken should be in consultation with HR and where relevant, Registry.

Failure on the part of a member of staff to promptly declare the existence of a personal relationship in accordance with the requirements of this policy and which results in the academic, administrative or institutional activities of the ICR being brought into question may result in disciplinary action being taken.

**5.0** **Complaints and Further Support**

We are committed to promoting a working environment based on dignity, trust and respect, and one that is free from all forms of bullying, harassment, including sexual harassment, victimisation and discrimination.

For further information on the proactive measures that we take to prevent bullying and harassment (including sexual harassment and misconduct) in the workplace and educational environment, you should refer to our [Dignity at the ICR policy](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Policies/DispForm.aspx?ID=286).

If you find yourself in a situation where you are bullied or harassed while you are at work or studying at the ICR, including where a personal relationship has broken down, we encourage you to raise a complaint under our [Dignity at the ICR policy](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Policies/DispForm.aspx?ID=286).

If you have any other complaint about unfair treatment at work due to a personal relationship breakdown, you should raise this with your line manager or the HR department, your union representative (if you are a member of the union), or you can raise it formally under our [Grievance policy](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Policies/DispForm.aspx?ID=491) if it applies to you. Students should contact Registry in such circumstances.

Students who are concerned about a relationship with a member of staff are urged at the earliest opportunity to consult their Senior Tutor or Head of Division (or equivalent), as appropriate.

Employees and students may also seek support from the [Employee and Student Assistance Programme](https://instituteofcancerresearch.spectrum.life/login?org=ICREAP).

Any incidents of inappropriate behaviour can be reported through the [Report + Support](https://reportandsupport.icr.ac.uk/) platform, either anonymously or with their contact details to receive a direct response.

Staff that are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship should seek guidance from their line manager, HR or a union representative (if a member of the union).

**6.0** **Data Protection**

We process personal data collected in relation to this policy in accordance with our [Data Protection Policy](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Policies/DispForm.aspx?ID=456).

You should immediately report any inappropriate access or disclosure of employee or student data in accordance with our [Data Protection Policy](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Policies/DispForm.aspx?ID=456) as this constitutes a data protection breach. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which we will deal with under our [disciplinary procedure](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Policies/DispForm.aspx?ID=243), or [student disciplinary procedure](https://nexus.icr.ac.uk/Lists/ICR%20Policies/DispForm.aspx?ID=589) as appropriate.