

Staffing Policy: Staff: Staff Relationships

The University of Aberdeen seeks to ensure that its policies and procedures promote equality of opportunity to all members of staff and potential members of staff. It recognises that there are members of staff who are spouses, partners, close relatives or individuals in a close relationship with another member of a School/Section and seeks to put procedures in place to ensure there is no conflict of interest in the appointment of such individuals or in their subsequent line management arrangements when working for the University. Emphasis is placed on the ethical responsibility of staff not to abuse power.*

The University recognises that any potential conflict of interest whether real or perceived can result in difficulties for other members of staff working in the same area.

The aim of this policy is to safeguard the work relationships of all members of staff. It is also to ensure that any work relationships between staff do not indirectly affect students.

POLICY

The maintenance of the highest professional and ethical standards is essential to the pursuit of good practice in University teaching and learning, research and administration. In this context, and to avoid conflict of interest, it is important that staff avoid situations where a close personal relationship with another member of staff could influence professional judgements or decisions. However, where a member of staff discloses a relationship the matter should be treated with complete confidentiality.

In order to promote the University's commitment to a quality teaching and learning environment the boundaries of the professional role of staff must be fully recognised and respected. The University expects that all staff will maintain these boundaries and respect these obligations.

Relationships between Staff Members

1.1 Where a personal relationship exists, a member of staff is precluded from taking part in any aspect of the following procedures which involve reaching a decision relating to a spouse, partner, close relative or individual in a close relationship with that member of staff:

- recruitment and selection (including the interview process)
- appointment (having input to the job offer)
- probation
- evaluation of jobs and grading
- appraisal
- promotion opportunities
- training and development opportunities
- redundancy
- grievance or disciplinary procedures

Normally, where a personal relationship exists, a member of staff is precluded from participating as a member of a panel/committee which involves their spouse/partner, except with the express permission of the Senior Vice Principal/University Secretary (as appropriate). The Senior Vice Principal/University Secretary (as appropriate) may choose to delegate responsibility for the consideration of individual requests to Heads of School/Section. Such permission will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

1.2 Whenever a spouse, partner, close relative or individual in a close relationship with another member of a School/Section is involved in any HR procedure referred to in 1.1 then that member of staff must declare an interest and withdraw from the process. If he/she is required to give his/her views on any aspect of the process to a Committee this should be done in the full knowledge that there is a potential conflict and that conflict should be formally declared at the Committee meeting on each and every occasion that the potential conflict arises.

- 1.3 If a Head of School /Section is precluded as in 1.1 then he/she should not have access to the relevant paperwork for the position except to the extent of presenting views if requested by the Committee as in 1.2 any potential conflict of interest should be declared to the Committee.
- 1.4 If a Head of School/Section is asked to be part of a Promotions Committee and one of the applicants is someone with whom he/she has a close personal relationship then the Senior Vice Principal should ensure that the Head of School is not involved in any discussion or consideration of the applicant's suitability for promotion.
- 1.5 Where an appointment is not subject to the University's normal recruitment procedures, for example the person may be named on a research grant, no spouse, partner, close relative or individual in a close relationship to the line manager may be employed without the prior knowledge and approval of the Head of School and the Director of Human Resources.
- 1.6 Where a family or close personal relationship exists it will be the duty of the member of staff to disclose the relationship to the Head of School/Section or Human Resources. The Head of School must give an explicit assurance of confidentiality.
- 1.7 Where the Head of School/Section is involved in such a family or close personal relationship the Senior Vice Principal/University Secretary should be advised and they will determine the appropriate line management arrangements for the individual involved. (for example it may be possible for the individual to be line managed by the Deputy Head of School or it may be necessary to consider relocating the individual to another School).

Failure to disclose a personal relationship coupled with participation in any of the processes mentioned in 1.1 might leave a member of staff open to complaint and investigation under the appropriate disciplinary policy.

***Footnote**

It is also recognised that a potential conflict arises in cases of previous relationships. It therefore follows that this policy applies equally to both current and past relationships as appropriate.