



**LIVERPOOL
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Professional Boundaries Standards for the Staff and Student Relationships Policy

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Professional Boundaries Standards for the Staff and Student Relationships Policy

Staff are responsible for maintaining clear boundaries and upholding ethical standards in their dealings with students. In particular staff must give due regard to their particular responsibilities for student welfare and safeguarding by ensuring that behaviour and interactions are professional at all times. As such, they should consider the following guidelines as to appropriate professional boundaries when dealing with students. Staff generally have a greater power in the staff/student relationship and as such it is the responsibility of the member of staff to consider the appropriateness of the interactions with students.

All staff and students have the right to complain if they believe that they have been subject to unacceptable behaviour whilst working or studying at the university. The Dignity at Work and Study Policy outlines how this may be done.

These examples are not exhaustive.

A. Language

Staff should develop relationships with the students based on mutual trust and respect. However, students are not 'friends'. The University also recognises that staff may have duties to provide appropriate pastoral support and build rapport with students however, care must be taken to ensure language remains professional and appropriate. With this in mind, staff must be thoughtful with their use of language and avoid the following:

- Conversations, humour, jokes or innuendo of a sexual nature
Flattering or criticising a student's appearance – consider carefully the difference between building a rapport or giving compliments about physical appearance
- Discrimination towards students based on their perceived or actual protected characteristics (gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or beliefs)
- Engaging in any behaviour that humiliates or vilifies a student
- Failing to intervene in the harassment of students
- Obscene or inappropriate gestures
- Overfamiliarity with students.

B. Information & Confidentiality

Staff should avoid sharing personal information with students, particularly online. Setting professional boundaries online is as relevant as University and lecture-based or office-based boundaries. Remember – your social media profile is publically available. Some examples to avoid include:

- Discussing your personal life and that of other staff or students unless directly relevant to the learning topic and with the individual's consent
- Leaving your email files open and unattended when away from your computer
- Being overheard while on the telephone (it is understood that this may not always be avoidable but discretion and confidentiality should be maintained as much as possible)
- Giving a student a personal phone number or email address
- 'Friending' a student on a private social media site. A professional forum such as LinkedIn may be considered professional rather than private but care should still be taken to maintain appropriate boundaries
- Correspondence of a personal nature via any medium or forum (phone, text, letters,

- email, social media etc.) not related to the staff member's professional role
- Correspondence (via any medium) to or from students where a breach of professional boundaries is anticipated
 - Adopting a student welfare role that exceeds your position, or a role that is designated to another staff member (e.g. a counsellor, a more senior lecturer etc.) or external professional, without the authorisation of the head of department. In all such situations students should be directed to the appropriate welfare service within the University
 - Photographing, recording or filming students via any medium without authorisation from both the head of department and the students
 - Using personal rather than University equipment for University based activities, unless authorised in writing by the Head of School. There should not be any necessity for using personal equipment but if so a clear case must be made to the Head of School including details as to where this material will be stored (preferably on a School secure drive and not on a personal drive)
 - Facilitating or permitting access to sexually explicit material unless specifically related to the learning programme
 - Any images or recordings of students on personal equipment or kept in personal locations, such as your home, that have not been authorised by the Head of Department or School
 - Publishing or uploading images or recordings of students to any location without the students and leadership consent.

Please note that the use, safety and security of student data is important in all interactions with students. Staff should not use student data for any personal use of any kind. A failure to use student personal data appropriately may result in disciplinary action.

C. Physical Conduct

It is important to respect the personal space of all our students and staff. Remember that others can interpret our actions differently. It is easy for these situations to escalate if we are not sensitive to our professional boundaries. Some examples to avoid include:

- Unwarranted or unwanted touching
- Initiating, requesting or permitting inappropriate or unnecessary physical contact
- Staff should also be aware of diversity issues such as cultural differences which may be a factor and ensure that 'personal space' is respected at all times. If in doubt please contact your HR Manager.

D. Work and Home

Maintaining a distinction between the personal and the professional is essential. Remaining professional at all times minimises the likelihood of false allegations. Examples to avoid:

- Inviting students to attend your home
- Allowing students access to a staff member's personal internet networking sites/social media
- Meeting a student at their home or lodgings or meeting them socially
- Being alone with a student outside of a staff member's responsibilities unless agreed by the Head of Department or School
- Where a one-to-one discussion is required, including coaching or supervision, this must take place in an appropriate locations on campus. Staff should pay careful attention to ensuring that other people are in the vicinity and that assistance could be called if required. Preferably, if a one-to-one meeting is needed this should take place in a room that has a door with a glass panel for increased visibility.

E. Collusion

All staff involved in teaching and supporting learning should be careful not to collude with students to the detriment of others. Students can draw staff into inappropriate conversations and situations and they should always remain within the boundaries of their professional role.

F. Role Model

Staff involved in teaching and supporting learning should also try to be role models to our students and respect students as individuals. They should encourage them to think critically and engage in the free exchange of ideas. They should challenge socially injurious ideas without imposing their own political, social and religious beliefs onto students. Done correctly, they can encourage students to adopt new approaches to thinking about themselves and others.

G. Gifts & Loaning

Avoid giving students personal gifts or greeting cards and lending items. Students should be discouraged from offering gifts to staff, unless the students offer a modest gift as a thank you present on ending their studies. Any gift over £25 in value should be reported to the relevant USET member or the Vice Chancellor under the Declarations of Interest Policy.