



HIGHER HEALTH

Higher Education and Training
Health, Wellness and Development Centre

Protocol on Staff- Student Relationships June 2023

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Protocol on Staff-Student Relationships

1. Background

- a. All institutions have to guard against the abuse of unequal power in the institution and the exploitation of vulnerable students for sexual purposes by those who hold positions of power.
 - b. This protocol applies to staff members who might be as vulnerable as students in relation to senior staff, such as junior staff, interns, volunteers and fellows, and although the word 'student' is used throughout, the protocol covers these groups as well.
 - c. In order to create an environment free from SGBV, the institution has adopted a Sexual and Gender Related Misconduct Policy (SGBV Policy) that aims to protect all members of the campus community from SGBV.
 - d. This protocol aims to curtail and guard against abuse of power by staff members, that might hamper or damage the personal and educational potential of their students.
 - e. The manner in which to offer protection to such students is to set boundaries on romantic relationships between staff members and students.
 - f. It is commonly known that staff members at institutions sometimes regularly and serially become involved with young students in a pattern that distorts the pedagogical paradigm and undermines the wellbeing of students.
 - g. Relationships between staff members and students are inherently conflicted as students are in a subordinate, dependent and unequal relationship to staff. There is high potential for abuse of power and a conflict of interest in instances where staff members are romantically or sexually involved with people they are supervising, teaching or managing.
 - h. While not all sexual/romantic relationships between staff members and students are inherently problematic there is sufficient potential for the abuse of power in such relationships which makes it obligatory for institutions to prevent such abuse.
 - i. Institutions need to have a zero tolerance approach to such abuse of power.
2. Stricter standards of behaviour must be adhered to by staff who hold positions of power over students.
 3. Given the unequal power relations between students and staff, it is prohibited for staff members to have romantic or sexual relationships with their students and constitutes serious misconduct which may justify dismissal, subject to 4 below.
 4. In the event that a staff member and a student are involved in a romantic or sexual relationship or wish to become romantically involved, and the staff member wishes to avoid disciplinary action the following rules apply:
 - a. The staff member must immediately inform HR, the **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE** and their line manager in writing of the relationship.
 - b. The **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE** or HR must interview the staff member and student, and where appropriate offer counselling.
 - c. On an annual basis the staff member must sign a declaration to be submitted to HR and the **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE** stating that there will be no conflict of interest if the relationship continues.
 - d. Staff must recuse themselves from any situation where a conflict of interest might occur. For example if they are supervising, teaching or managing the work of such a student.

- e. The student must inform the **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE** in writing that they are in a relationship with a staff member and that the relationship is consensual and that they have entered into the relationship voluntarily.
5. Aside from the exemptions set out in paragraph 4 any staff member who has a sexual or romantic relationship with a student is in violation of this policy. Violation of this policy by a staff member constitutes misconduct that will result in disciplinary action taken in terms of the disciplinary procedure set out in the SGBV Policy of the institution and/or applicable human resources-related disciplinary procedures.