

**Relationships between staff at work policy**

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**Contents**

- 1. Introduction .....2
- 2. Purpose or Aim .....2
- 3. Scope .....2
- 4. Definitions .....2
- 5. Policy Statement .....2
- 6. Relations between existing staff .....3
- 7. Relations between existing staff and job applicants (internal and external) .....4
- 8. Roles and Responsibilities .....4
- 9. Training .....4
- 10. Monitoring or Audit .....4
- 11. Associated and Related Procedural Documents .....4
- 12. References .....4

## 1. Introduction

Some codes of conduct describe professional standards concerning relationships between staff and the impact that those relationship may have on care.

There is a need for clear advice following reviews of a number of critical incidents where personal relationships have compromised or potentially compromised clinical care; and also following investigations into grievances.

NHS workplaces are complex. They feature professional relationships where some parties are more powerful than others - because of their management or supervisory status. Some people also have more power because of the informal influence that they have over colleagues. Sometimes this power can consciously or subconsciously influence the actions of colleagues to either their advantage and/or the disadvantage of the Trust. Relationships within teams become even more complex when strong personal feelings are present.

The right of all people to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace is clearly identified in the [Bullying, harassment and dignity at work policy](#).

## 2. Purpose or Aim

This policy describes the obligations of staff with regard to their social and business relationships with colleagues. It also sets out the principles that an intelligent professional should consider when addressing situations where these expectations have not been fulfilled.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to all employees of the Trust. It also applies to other workers carrying out their duties as part of other AWP teams, for example bank and agency staff or local authority employees working in integrated teams.

It applies to job applicants in so far as applicants are advised to declare “significant social relationships” with existing staff and service users.

## 4. Definitions

A significant social relationship is one where a person whose close relationship with an individual affects that individual’s behaviour, attitudes and self-esteem. A significant social relationship usually exists with a family member, spouse, child, common law partner, close friend, sexual partner, business partner or a person who may serve as a role model to an individual or a person whose acceptance and approval is sought.

## 5. Policy Statement

At the earliest opportunity, staff should tell their line manager about any “significant social relationship” that they have with someone in a team in which they work. A failure to do this may lead to disciplinary action being taken against both parties. The purpose of this confidential declaration is to ensure that both the Trust’s interests and the interests of individual members of staff are best protected.

No member of staff is simply an employee. Staff enjoy social needs: personal friendships, romantic attachments and family relationships. However, to protect staff, service users and the Trust, staff should work with their managers to ensure personal relationships between staff do not compromise their work or lead others to believe that they might. Additionally, the professional relationships between some staff (e.g. line management relationships) are so important that they should not be compromised at all by the existence of a “significant social relationship”.

## 6. Relations between existing staff

Typically, the Trust does not have any interest in relationships between staff unless they operate in the same team and abuse that relationship to the detriment of others or are perceived by others to be in a position to do so.

Significant social relationships between members of the same team are generally discouraged because they may subconsciously affect decision making. However, in reality it is recognised that strictly professional relationships can naturally develop into significant social relationships. Staff will be supported to best ensure that decision making cannot be compromised particularly where there is an early declaration. Nevertheless, staff must not enter into significant social relationships with members of staff who they directly line manage or supervise.

Staff should tell their line manager about any significant social relationship that they have with someone in their team at the earliest opportunity.

It is recognised that a member of staff may be reluctant on grounds of confidentiality to make such a declaration or alternatively may be too embarrassed. However, they are encouraged to do so, to protect themselves from any later allegations that the relationship has led to their professional practice in some way being compromised.

It is a requirement of all managers that they sensitively and confidentially address any declarations of this kind. Assuming the matter is not being addressed in a grievance or disciplinary context the manager will only consider; the nature of the relationship, any reasonably foreseeable damage to the Trust's reputation, any reasonably foreseeable perceptions of colleagues, and any other reasonably foreseeable damage to the service.

The manager will only put in place arrangements necessary to manage any foreseeable threats recognising that the needs and rights of employees must not be compromised except where clearly necessary to do so.

It is expected that it will only rarely be necessary to change any practice to manage any issues. Exceptionally it may be decided that the parties cannot continue to work in the same team. Examples of changes to practice might be an agreement that two members of staff do not take joint responsibility for given cases, or will not work on the same shift together.

However, it may be necessary to redeploy one or other of the parties based on a reasonable and documented consideration of all the facts in the case leading to this decision. This might arise, for instance, if two parties are married and rostering possibilities within their team mean that they could not regularly work opposing shifts. Any such response will need to be handled sensitively and consistently.

In exceptional cases, where redeployment is the appropriate response to an issue, and where this decision follows an appropriate declaration of a significant social relationship, the party to be redeployed will be given priority in recruitment processes except over the small number of medical redeployees with a recognised disability. Each case will be considered on its own merits due to the individualised nature of such circumstances.

- Both parties may initially be placed on the redeployment register.
- Members of staff will have the right to be supported in line with the [Right of staff to be accompanied policy](#).
- Changes to practice and temporary redeployment may be required prior to long term issues being resolved.
- The individual will be retained on the redeployment register and managed for a period of 3 months following the declaration. After this, and only if it has not been possible to redeploy one or other party, then if necessary consideration will be given to providing notice of dismissal, using the process described in the [Disciplinary Policy and Procedure](#).

- Decisions of this kind may only be made by a Locality, Specialised or Corporate Director within the Trust who will initially consider a report prepared by the relevant line manager which has also been made available to the individuals concerned.

## 7. Relations between existing staff and job applicants (internal and external)

Job applicants will be required to declare significant relationships with existing AWP staff. Depending on the circumstances this may mean that the job applicant cannot work in that team, but will not bar them from work in another capacity within the Trust

A member of staff cannot participate in any way in an appointment process where they are in a significant social relationship with a candidate.

## 8. Roles and Responsibilities

### All employees and workers:

- Should not to enter into any “significant social relationship” with anyone with whom they are in a line management or supervisory relationship;
- Must declare any “significant social relationships” with any work colleagues to their line managers.

### All Managers and Supervisors will:

- Address all relevant discussions sensitively and confidentially;
- Consistently apply this policy, taking advice as appropriate;
- Maintain confidential records of all controls imposed, so that this can be referred to in case of future conflict.

## 9. Training

There is no specific training provision, but advice is available on Ourspace and from the Employee Relations team.

## 10. Monitoring or Audit

The Trust will monitor the implementation of this policy by:

- requiring exception reporting via the HR senior management team

Representatives from trades unions formally recognised by the Trust and management representatives have drawn up this policy. Management as part of the review will provide meaningful statistics.

This policy will be reviewed after 3 years or earlier at the request of either party.

## 11. Associated and Related Procedural Documents

[Grievance and Disputes Policy and Procedure](#)

[Disciplinary Policy & Procedure](#)

[Recruitment and Selection Policy](#)

## 12. References

This policy has been drawn up with reference to current UK and European employment legislation and relevant national terms and conditions.

<b>Version History</b>				
<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Revision description</b>	<b>Editor</b>	<b>Status</b>
1.0	22 Jun 2009	To Quality and Healthcare Governance Board Committee	AM	Final Draft
1.1	27 July 2009	Approved by Quality and Healthcare Governance Board Committee	AM	Approved
2.0	06 July 2010	Approved at Q&HGC for 3 years	CS	Approved
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4.1	21 August 2014	Administrative updates	SJ	Approved
5.0	16 May 2017	Policy reviewed. No amendments made to the content. Administrative updates to transfer policy to the Trust's new policy template. Hyperlinks updated.	Employee Relations Specialist	Approved