



Personal Relationships between Staff and Students Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

Norland has a legal, regulatory and ethical responsibility to provide a high quality, supportive, inclusive and safe learning and working environment for its students and staff. This commitment will enable staff and students to fulfil their personal potential. To enable this, Norland expects staff to apply the highest standards of professionalism in all interactions with students to recognise this is a shared expectation within the Norland community.

It is important to acknowledge that the inherent nature of staff and student roles means that staff are in a position of power relative to a student, irrespective of the student's age, maturity and level of study. Therefore, staff must always act in a professional, respectful and fair manner, recognising this differential of power and influence. The power imbalance between staff and students creates the potential for sexual misconduct to occur between staff and students. Consequently, intimate personal relationships between staff and students are not encouraged.

Under the Sexual Offences Act (2003) it is a criminal offence to enter into a sexual activity with a person under the age of 18 where the adult is in a position of trust. All Norland staff are in a position of trust.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to promote a safe, active learning community where interactions between staff and students are a positive aspect of the student experience, for all its members, clarifying Norland's expectations regarding professional behaviour and respectful boundaries for staff and students.

1.2 Scope and definitions

This policy covers all Norland staff and students. For the purpose of this policy:

Staff	a person who has been employed by Norland to carry out a specific role within the college. They may be permanent or fixed term, paid or unpaid, part or full-time, work remotely or on campus. This also applies to any director, trustee or a contractor appointed on a Service Level Agreement.
Student	an individual who has registered and enrolled onto a programme of study at Norland and are formally engaged with learning, regardless of whether they study on campus, off campus or online. This definition includes deferred students, interrupted student and visiting students.

For the purpose of this policy, there are two types of relationship. They are collectively referred to as personal relationships.

Intimate personal relationships with the exception of excluded relationships, including marital, life partner, physical, sexual (either isolated or repeated), emotional and romantic, regardless of gender, gender identity or sexual



orientation, and which is consensual. It is strongly recommended that any relevant staff member does not engage with or form an intimate personal relationship with one or more students.

Close personal relationship a relationship with a relative, close family friend, close friend or a relationship where there is a financial dependence.

Excluded relationships refer to any ongoing intimate personal relationship that either existed before 1 August 2025 (date the E6 condition came into force) and that remains in existence or existed before the date that the member of staff became a relevant staff member in relation to that student.

Consent to an intimate personal relationship

in order to have an intimate personal relationship, consent must be given. Someone consents to being in an intimate personal relationship and /or engage in sexual activity only if s/he agrees by choice to that activity and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice. The person seeking the consent must ensure that it is freely given and is an informed decision. They must also be aware that it can be withdrawn at any time and past consent does not mean present consent.

Freedom to consent

in order to have freedom to consent a person must not fear the result of not consenting. A person is not free to choose if, for example, they are being threatened or they could perceive they are being threatened, if their studies and assessments could be affected, if their future career could be affected or a power imbalance means they are being pressurised to commence or continue a relationship. Norland takes the position that where there is an imbalance of power it is unlikely that consent can be freely given out of choice.

Capacity to consent

in order to have capacity to consent a person must have the mental and physical capacity to consent. This can be a one off or an ongoing situation. For example, capacity to consent may be affected by the influence of drugs or alcohol or the presence of a cognitive or learning difficulty, or a mental health condition. Staff also need to be aware that a personal intimate relationship with a student under the age of 18 is covered in the Sexual Offences Act (2003).

Harassment

as per the Equality Act 2010, is unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic (like race, gender, or disability) that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. It can also be defined as conduct that causes alarm or distress. This can include a range of behaviours, from verbal abuse to physical intimidation, that violates a person's dignity or creates a hostile environment. It can occur in various settings, including the workplace and public spaces.



Sexual misconduct	is any unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature including physical and/ or non-physical behaviours. It is characterised by a lack of consent, meaning the behaviour is unwelcome and the individual does not agree to it, either verbally or non-verbally. It extends to include online conduct.
Abuse of power	means a situation where a relevant staff member exploits a position of power in relation to a student so as to apply pressure in a way which: - May result in the student doing something, or refraining from doing something, that they may not have otherwise done and - That action or inaction could reasonably result in something that falls within the scope of an intimate personal relationship.
Sexualised	to make sexual, or attribute sex or a sex role to a situation or to give sexual associations to a situation.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES OF NORLAND STAFF

It is important that staff recognise that they are in a position of trust, and that it is their professional and ethical responsibility not to abuse that trust. Academic staff are trusted to teach, guide and supervise students. We expect all staff to recognise and maintain professional boundaries, in order to provide students a high quality supportive and safe learning environment, to avoid abuse of trust through the imbalance of power and influence, and to avoid perceived or actual conflicts of interest.

It is important to note that reference to emotional intimacy should not prevent a member of staff engaging compassionately and considerately with a student on a professional basis.

It is important to recognise that different lived experiences and backgrounds may cause a difference in approach to professional boundaries and relationship, so it is key that the responsibilities in this policy are understood.

It is recognised that staff with responsibility for supervising students should recognise the particular imbalance of power in these relationships and the intersectional vulnerabilities this creates for these students.

Consequently, subject to the exceptions below, staff:

- must not pursue or enter into an intimate personal relationship with a student or purchase transactional sex from any student. Intimate personal relationships can lead to perceived or actual conflicts of interest, which can have a detrimental effect on the teaching, learning and research environment for other students and colleagues.
- should contribute to creating a professional working environment where the development of an intimate personal relationship with a student is unacceptable.



- must ensure interactions with students are always professional and appropriate, avoiding conduct towards students that is unprofessional, inappropriate or in any way sexualised.
- must maintain professional relationships with students based on trust, confidence and equal treatment of all students.
- should not (where possible) enter into close personal relationships with a student for whom they have a professional responsibility, for example in the areas of teaching, learning, assessment, selection, pastoral care, bursary allocation or research. Close personal relationships can lead to perceived or actual conflicts of interests, which can have a detrimental effect on the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues.
- must not promise or allude to rewards in return for sexual favours or suggest or threaten the withdrawal of teaching or other forms of academic support if sexual access is not granted. Such behaviour constitutes misconduct and will be subject to disciplinary processes.

This policy covers all areas of Norland. Any intimate personal relationship between a member of staff and a student raises questions about consent, the imbalance of authority and influence, conflict of interest, trust and/ or confidentiality which may occur at the outset, during, or on the termination of a relationship. Such conflicts, as outline above, may arise in relation to the following areas (this list is not exhaustive):

- supervision of any student
- deployment of financial and other resources
- all aspects of teaching and learning, including assessment and selection
- access to confidential information
- access to student services, including financial assistance, accommodation and other services
- matters including employment, career opportunities, placements, complaints and discipline
- assignment of paid work and facilities to students
- pastoral care
- indirect influence on other staff or students

Professional boundaries should be the norm for all staff, for example, meetings, lectures, dissertation supervision, etc. should normally take place on campus. Exceptions may be appropriate in social settings off campus or on field trips.

Care should be taken when members of staff invite students into their homes. This is appropriate for group activities, for example, students in a research group are meeting in a group social context. Members of staff should ensure that where students are invited to their home, Norland standards for inclusivity are followed so that no students feel excluded.

Students should be engaged for work that is undertaken for staff at Norland following the recruitment process. Staff can engage students to work in their home, for example babysitting, but they must disclose this working relationship to the Head of HR as soon as such an engagement has been agreed.

Social media has provided a platform for staff to share, collaborate and network nationally and, where relevant, globally. These additional dimensions can be a real benefit. However, the use of social media can blur professional boundaries and so staff should conduct themselves with common sense and act with professionalism and integrity in their interactions with students. For more information, please see the Communications, Email and Internet Policy in the staff handbook.



Staff are expected to communicate with students via Norland's accounts linked to their role, for example Norland email addresses, telephone numbers and Teams. Norland recognises that there may be time, for example during field trips where this is not possible. Norland expects staff to follow the Practical Guide for Data Protection and conduct themselves with common sense and act with professionalism and integrity.

Relationships which are coerced, coercive, exploitative or sexualised are always unacceptable and must not occur.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF NORLAND STUDENTS

Students should not exert sexual pressure over a member of staff or behave in a coercive or predatory manner towards a member of staff. This type of behaviour will be subject to the Cause for Action Procedure, the Student Disciplinary Procedure and Norland's Code of Professional Responsibilities.

Students can report and seek support for harassment or sexual misconduct that occurs within a relationship regardless of whether the relationship is permitted under this policy.

4. EXCEPTIONS AND DECLARATIONS

Norland recognises that an individual whose primary relationship with the College is as a student may be employed by Norland, for example as a Student Helper. Unless these individuals have direct academic or other direct professional responsibility with other students, this policy does not apply.

The requirements noted in the section below should be followed in the following circumstances where:

- An intimate personal relationship between a member of staff and a student existed prior to this policy coming into effect (August 2025).
- An intimate personal relationship between a member of staff and a student existed prior to one of the partners becoming a member of staff or becoming a student at Norland.
- A close personal relationship between a member of staff and a student existed prior to this policy coming into effect (August 2025) where the staff member has a direct academic or other direct professional responsibility for the student.
- A close personal relationship between a member of staff and a student existed prior to one of the partners becoming a member of staff or becoming a student at Norland where the staff member has a direct academic or other direct professional responsibility for the student.
- A member of staff may be involved in selection/ acceptance of a prospective student with whom they have an intimate personal relationship or a close personal relationship.

Where any of the above circumstances occur, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to declare their relationship to Norland at the earliest opportunity so that an assessment can be made of any potential conflict of interest and influence. Norland recognises that this information is confidential, sensitive information and it will be shared with the Principal, relevant head of department/ line manager and HR, unless a conflict of interest and influence plan requires notification to any other individual(s). The details of any action needed will be recorded in a conflict of interest plan.



An intimate personal relationship which existed prior to this policy coming into effect (August 2025) should have been declared no later than 1 December 2025.

An intimate person relationship which existed before both partners became members of Norland should be declared at the earliest opportunity and no later than one month of both partners becoming members of the College.

5. MANAGING POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND INFLUENCE

Staff should not:

- Have responsibility for aspects of the student's work which require judgement, for example academic assessment.
- Be in a position to take decisions affecting the student, including the provision or withholding of any of the following: the allocation of places on the course, bursaries, facilities, placements

Where a potential or actual conflict of interest is identified, a conflict of interest plan should be prepared in discussion with the member of staff and the head of department to ensure that appropriate action is taken to minimise the potential effect of the relationship on other staff or students, and to protect the member of staff and student. The member of staff will be required to comply with the actions specified in the conflict of interest plan. A record of the conflict of interest plan will be retained by Norland in accordance with its Privacy Notice for Employees. It is good practice to review the conflict of interest plan annually, for example at the start of each academic year, or more frequently if necessary.

If it is agreed that there is no conflict of interest, this should be notified to the member of staff. This will be retained by Norland in accordance with its Privacy Notice for Employees. Norland reserves the right to review this in circumstances changes.

A student involved in a relationship should not be disadvantaged due to the relationship.

Where an intimate personal relationship breaks down, Norland expects that the member of staff and the student will continue to conduct themselves in an appropriate and professional manner. The conflict of interest plan should be reviewed and consideration given to whether the actions should be maintained.

8. BREACH OF THE POLICY AND NON-DISCLOSURE

Subject to the exceptions above, after adoption of this policy by Norland from August 2025, no member of staff should commence or pursue an intimate personal relationship with a student. Should this event occur, this will be a breach of the policy and Norland will manage this through the staff disciplinary procedure.

Failure to on the part of the member of staff to declare an intimate personal relationship or a close personal relationship with a student (as set out in section 2) may result in disciplinary action being taken for non-disclosure. Norland will manage this through the staff disciplinary procedure.

Staff who are uncertain about what action to take should seek guidance from HR.

9. FURTHER ACTION



Where a student considers they have been personally adversely affected by a misuse of power, influence or authority or by a conflict of interest, they should raise it with the Head of Student and Academic Services in the first instance.

Where a member of staff considers they have been personally adversely affected by a misuse of power, influence, or authority or by a conflict of interest, they should raise it with their line manager/ head of department, or HR in the first instance.

Formal complaints can be submitted through the Student Complaints Procedure, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy or the Staff Grievance Policy.

Where Norland is made aware of a relationship, following the steps above or other means, appropriate action will be taken to investigate and manage this as sensitively as possible. Appropriate action will be taken which may result in disciplinary action.

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