

# **Student-Staff Relationships Policy**

### Document Control Table

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# Staff and Student Relationships

## 1. Policy Statement

NIoT has a duty to protect students and staff within its community from incidences of harassment and sexual misconduct and to reduce the likelihood of incidences occurring. The NIoT *strongly discourages* any intimate personal relationships taking place between any staff members and students and, in some instances, has deemed that such relationships should *not* take place.

As such, certain NIoT employees should not enter into intimate personal relationships that are sexual and/or romantic with students. These staff will be referred to as 'appropriate ITE staff' members. Such intimate relationships are not condoned as they could compromise, or be perceived to compromise, trust, confidence, and professionalism due to a potential for 'imbalance of power' in such relationship. Pursuing such relationships can result in disciplinary action.

The NIoT definition of 'student' in this context refers to trainees enrolled on an ITE Initial Teacher Training programme such as within the Higher Education Context. Although relationships between staff and with students on NPQ programmes and within the ECF faculty are also discouraged.

The NIoT is committed to highlighting why student-staff intimate relationships can be problematic and we encourage students to come forward to discuss any behaviours which may amount to abuse of power, coercion, or sexual and/or romantic advances in the context of intimate personal relationships. Any incidents of harassment or sexual misconduct should be reported via the reporting mechanisms as outlined in the NIoT Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy.

There may some be exceptions, such as for those couples in pre-existing partnerships or when there is no 'imbalance of power' within the relationship. If a staff member does have such a personal relationship with a student, they have a responsibility to inform the Head of People for the information to be recorded, and appropriate safeguards can be made as outlined in the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct policy. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.

## 2. Scope and Definitions

This policy applies to all employees of the National Institute of Teaching.

The following sets out an illustrative and non-exhaustive list of the types of staff members that are expected to be captured by the definition of 'appropriate ITE staff member': These staff are:

- Teaching staff such as ITE Professional Tutors
- Programme Leaders such as Heads/Deputy Heads of ITE, Regional Principals
- Members of the Executive Leadership Team
- Professional Services Staff

When discussing 'students' within this policy, this applies to trainees who are enrolled as a student on a Higher Education programme at the National Institute of Teaching Initial, such as the Teacher Education Programme (ITE). This is due to the assessment of the Trainees sitting with the National Institute of Teaching, therefore creating a balance of impower within these relationships.

The definition of 'student' here does not apply to participants enrolled on the ECF or NPQ programmes who will be subject to the internal policy and procedure of their workplace or school. However, intimate relationships between staff and students on ECF / NPQ are *strongly discouraged* by the NIoT. Persons enrolled on ECF / NPQ programmes may report and receive appropriate support regarding incidences of harassment and sexual misconduct related to NIoT staff or other students as outlined in the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy.

### 3. Disclosures

In cases where an intimate personal relationship has taken place between staff who do not meet the 'appropriate ITE staff member' definition and students at NIoT, and / or in partner organisations, such as placement schools, in this instance the NIoT requests that these relationships are disclosed as follows:

- If it is a NIoT employee who is involved in an intimate personal relationship with a student, then they should disclose this to their line manager and Head of People.
- If it is a student who is involved in the intimate personal relationship with a member of staff from a placement school, they should disclose this to the Head of People at the NIoT and Head Teacher of the placement school.

Where this disclosure has been made verbally, it is requested that this is then followed up with a written disclosure.

The People department will keep a central register of student-staff relationships disclosed to the NIoT and will take necessary steps to reduce the likelihood of positive or negative treatment occurring that could constitute an 'abuse of power' or other discriminatory behaviour with regards to the student. For example, potential mechanisms will amount to:

- i. Ensuring the student is not at risk of adverse academic results, or negative references due to the actual or potential conflict of interest or abuse of power, and ensuring that the staff member cannot influence these, or appear to influence them
- ii. Ensuring there is no potential or actual unfair advantage to a student, for example in assessment, references or academic opportunities, due to their intimate personal relationship with a staff member.
- iii. ii. Amending the responsibilities of the staff member so they no longer meet the definition of a 'relevant staff member'.

Students can request a conversation with the Student Support Department to discuss any concerns they may have during or following an intimate personal relationship. At any point in a relationship, if a student is concerned that they have experienced harassment or sexual misconduct they should follow the steps in the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct policy to report the incident and gain appropriate advice and support on the next steps.

Any reported behaviours that contravene this policy or the staff / student code of conduct will be thoroughly investigated, and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken online with the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy.

Any member of staff who meet the definition of appropriate 'ITE staff' definition and pursues such relationships can result in disciplinary action.

#### **4. Monitoring Data**

The NIoT will take steps to monitor data and reporting regarding student staff intimate relationships that are disclosed to the organization. The following steps will be taken to analyse, disseminate and make judgements regarding the data gathered:

Gathering and analysing evidence of the prevalence of relationships between staff and students at the NIoT for submission to the appropriate NIoT board.

Assessing the volume, seriousness and nature of complaints made about relationships between staff and students.

Assessing the risk of harassment and/or sexual misconduct occurring as a result of the actual or potential abuse of power and conflicts of interest that can arise from relationships between staff and students. Consulting with students to ensure that their views, interests and needs are considered in determining the NIoT's approach to relationships between staff and students at the Student Engagement and Quality Compliance Committee (SEQA).

#### **5. Training and Support**

The NIoT will ensure that all staff are appropriately trained in understanding Harassment and Sexual Misconduct and will ensure that training in professional boundaries is offered to all staff to minimise the likelihood of harassment and sexual misconduct taking place within such relationships.

This includes Harassment and Sexual Misconduct training which forms part of the annual universal training that mandatory for all staff.

#### **6. Reporting Concerns**

Any concerns about such behaviours can be reported via the process outlined in the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy. Reports can be anonymous or non-anonymous and prior consultation can be offered about this either from Student Support Team or the People Team, as appropriate.