

Personal Relationships Policy

Purpose

Whitecliffe is committed to maintaining a safe, respectful and professional learning and working environment. This Policy provides guidance on the management of close personal relationships involving staff and students, and between staff members, to mitigate conflicts of interest, address power imbalances, and uphold academic integrity and workplace standards.

Scope

This Policy applies to all staff and students of Whitecliffe and to all activities undertaken in connection with the Institute, including on campus, off-site activities, and digital or online environments. For the purposes of this Policy, all members of the Whitecliffe workforce are referred to as 'staff'.

Related Policies and Documents

This document should be read in conjunction with the following Whitecliffe policies and documents:

- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Delegation of Authority Register
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedure
- Student Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy
- Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Procedure
- Staff Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Support for Students Policy
- Student Code of Conduct
- Staff Code of Conduct

Related References and Legislation

- Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (TEQSA Act)
- Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Cth)
- Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (Cth)
- National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018
- National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)
- Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)

Definitions

For this Policy the following definitions apply:

Close Personal Relationship	A relationship that extends beyond a professional connection or acquaintance. This includes, but is not limited to, familial relationships, financial dependence, romantic or sexual relationships, and current or former partners.
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Consent to an Intimate Relationship	A voluntary, informed agreement made without coercion, manipulation, or fear of adverse consequences. Consent may be withdrawn at any time.
Position of Authority	A role involving oversight, influence, or decision-making power over another individual, including academic, administrative, supervisory or leadership responsibilities.

Policy

This Policy sets out expectations for the management of close personal relationships within the Whitecliffe community. Whitecliffe recognises that close personal relationships may arise within its community. While not inherently inappropriate, such relationships may give rise to conflicts of interest, perceptions of bias, and risks associated with power imbalances, undue influence, and gender-based misconduct.

Staff hold positions of trust and may exercise influence over students and colleagues. Accordingly, clear professional boundaries must be maintained to ensure impartiality, protect the integrity of academic and workplace outcomes, and safeguard the welfare of all individuals.

All members of the Whitecliffe community are expected to act transparently and responsibly, including promptly disclosing and appropriately managing any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest.

Staff-Student Relationships

Whitecliffe values positive and professional engagement between staff and students as part of a respectful and supportive learning environment. Staff must, however, always maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

Staff must:

- exercise sound judgement and act professionally, recognising that actions may be misinterpreted regardless of intent
- avoid entering into close personal or intimate relationships with students with whom they have direct academic, supervisory or welfare responsibilities
- ensure that any personal relationship, including after it ends, does not adversely affect the learning or working environment

Whitecliffe prohibits staff from engaging in close personal or intimate relationships with students for whom they have direct academic or welfare responsibility.

Staff must not:

- engage in any intimate relationship with a person under 18 years of age
- initiate or pursue relationships through coercion, exploitation, or misuse of authority
- engage in behaviour that compromises professional boundaries or may be perceived as predatory

Staff must:

- disclose any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest arising from a close personal relationship as soon as practicable
- remove themselves from any decision-making processes involving a student with whom they have or have had a close personal relationship

Students who are concerned about a relationship or its disclosure are encouraged to raise the matter with an appropriate senior staff member. Any concerns regarding coercion, misconduct, or inappropriate behaviour must be reported in accordance with relevant Whitecliffe policies.

Whitecliffe will ensure that individuals are not disadvantaged for making a disclosure or raising a concern in good faith.

Staff-Staff Relationships

Close personal relationships between staff, particularly where a reporting line or power imbalance exists, may give rise to conflicts of interest, perceptions of favouritism, or risks to workplace culture.

Staff must:

- not exploit any imbalance of power or influence
- disclose and appropriately manage any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest
- not be involved in employment-related decisions affecting a staff member with whom they have, or have had, a close personal relationship
- ensure that personal relationships do not adversely affect professional conduct, team dynamics, or decision-making

Breaches of Policy

Breaches of this Policy, including failure to disclose a close personal relationship or conduct that compromises professional boundaries, will be managed in accordance with Whitecliffe's policies and procedures and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or engagement.

In managing breaches, Whitecliffe may:

- treat matters impacting a student's academic experience or welfare as serious
- review any academic or administrative decisions affected by an undisclosed relationship
- investigate allegations of misconduct, including harassment, coercion or victimisation, in accordance with relevant policies
- act in relation to false or vexatious complaints

Change and Version Control

Version	Date Approved	Authored by	Approved by	Description
1.0	May 20, 2026	Chief Executive Officer	Governing Board	Initial version establishing the Personal Relationships Policy within Whitecliffe's governance framework

Policy Information

Author:	CEO
Policy owner:	CEO
Approved by:	Governing Board
Approval date:	May 20, 2026
Status:	Approved
Next review due:	May 20, 2029

Appendix 1: Maintaining Professional Boundaries with Students

The following guidance supports staff in maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with students and should be applied in context.

To maintain appropriate relationships and reduce the risk of misconduct, conflicts of interest, or perceived boundary breaches, staff should:

- maintain appropriate physical and emotional boundaries and avoid conduct that could be misinterpreted
- not use their position of authority for personal benefit or to make commitments outside their professional role
- avoid forming relationships or showing undue attention that may be perceived as favouritism, dependency or grooming
- use Whitecliffe-approved communication channels for all student interactions and avoid personal messaging platforms unless necessary for legitimate academic purposes
- avoid contacting students outside reasonable working hours unless required for Institute-related activities
- conduct meetings in appropriate professional settings (e.g. campus, approved locations or public venues) and avoid one-on-one meetings in private or secluded environments
- avoid attending non-Institute social events with students unless there is a clear and appropriate professional context
- avoid engaging in discussions of a personal or intimate nature, including their own or a student's romantic or sexual relationships, except where such matters arise appropriately in the course of student support responsibilities
- refrain from behaviour that may cause a student to feel uncomfortable, unsafe, intimidated or pressured
- not engage in personal financial dealings with students, including borrowing, lending, or accepting money
- not accept personal favours from students or involve them in personal matters unrelated to their studies
- direct students requiring personal or well-being support to appropriate Whitecliffe services and avoid taking on support roles beyond professional responsibilities
- ensure that any teaching or creative practice involving simulated intimate, romantic or sexual content is appropriately managed, with clear boundaries and the informed consent of all participants
- apply these expectations consistently across all contexts, including mentorship, field trips, study tours, conferences, and online or digital environments