

BOUNDARIES POLICY

1 Background

The Students' Union provides a service to students who are our members. As such we have a responsibility to provide a professional service and to minimise:

- the potential for misunderstanding about the nature of professional relationships and the service we offer at SU;
- the potential for abuse;
- the potential for unfounded accusations of abuse.

We also have a responsibility to provide a caring, empowering, empathetic, understanding and approachable service to our members. It is important that all staff and members are clear about what is considered an appropriate relationship and that staff can provide this service whilst maintaining their professional roles. These guidelines have been written to help staff establish and maintain appropriate boundaries and to deliver a service consistently, within a supportive framework. This will sometimes be in difficult situations.

The SU acknowledges that working with student members can sometimes be an emotional activity. At times it can be unclear where appropriate boundaries lie and it can be difficult to maintain boundaries. The difference between a warm professional relationship and friendship that steps over the mark can be challenging to recognise.

This document exists to support staff in understanding the boundaries they are expected to adhere to.

2 What do we mean by boundaries?

Boundaries are the framework within which the relationship occurs between staff and members. Boundaries make the relationship clear, professional and safe for the member and the staff member. It is important to distinguish between friendliness as a quality in professional contact, and personal friendships. A key aspect of the word "professional" is that it has to do with work or employment as opposed to personal and private matters. Professionals are expected to demonstrate a particular level of competence in their job or employment, in relation to knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and experience. The term "relationship" in the context of a professional relationship should be understood as interaction, communication, rapport and contact between two people, as it relates to the work or provision of a service or support.

The primary concern in establishing and managing boundaries with each individual member must be in the best interests of the member. Except for behaviours of a sexual nature or obvious conflict of interest, for example if a member is a relation of a staff member, boundary considerations often are not clear-cut matters of right and wrong.

Rather, they are dependent upon many factors and require careful consideration, always being mindful of the best interests of the member.

3 What to do if you are not sure?

If you are unsure about the appropriateness of a situation you are in or an action you are taking, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- **Is this action in my job description?**
- **What role does the student see me in? Are they able to see me in more than one role and will this situation cause confusion to the member (and/or myself)?**
- **Will this action or situation undermine the work of other professional staff?**
- **Am I prepared to do this openly or not? If not, why not?**
- **Am I prepared to record this or have it recorded?**
- **Am I treating this member differently (e.g. in the amount of information I am sharing with them about myself)?**
- **Does the SU have a policy about this? If so, am I sure I know what it says? Does it specifically prohibit this action?**

If an action or situation is not specified in these guidelines and staff/ freelancers are still unsure, they should bring it to the attention of their line manager and discuss it openly.

If an immediate action was taken, which is brought to the attention of your line manager and a more appropriate action is identified, no blame, judgement or disciplinary action will follow, unless the action contravenes existing policy and guidelines.

4 Physical touch

Physical touch is an important part of demonstrating care for members; it can also be interpreted as sexual and/or inappropriate. It should be used in the knowledge that each member (and each staff member and freelancer) will have unique views and needs in this matter. Staff and freelancers must be cautious and respectful when any physical contact is involved, recognising the diversity of cultural norms with respect to touch and that such behaviour may be misinterpreted.

5 Personal information about staff/freelancers

Staff should be mindful to limit the personal information they share with members. If information of a personal nature is disclosed, the staff member should be clear about why they have done so and think through how they will respond to further questions/interest should it arise. Remember to ask yourself why you are disclosing information and what, if any, are the implications for the member who knows it. Members must never be taken to the home of a staff member.

6 Contact

Staff must neither sell things to, nor buy things from members.

SU recognises that because staff spend the majority of their working week with each other, the development of a close personal relationship between colleagues could happen. In the majority of cases, it is unlikely that a relationship between colleagues would have any impact on the work of the SU but there could be situations where an intimate relationship between two colleagues could create difficulties at work for other staff and/or the provision of the work.

The main area where problems are likely to arise is where there is a close personal relationship between an employee and their direct line manager. If this happens, we ask that both parties talk to the Chief Executive about the situation in order to discuss how any potential conflicts of interest might best be managed. Staff can be assured that the Chief Executive will treat these discussions with sensitivity.

For duty to disclose information please refer to the relevant section of the Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy.

Staff must not borrow money from, nor lend money to, members.

Children should not be brought into the workplace, except in emergencies when alternative arrangements cannot be made soon enough or when on a specific occasion a member has asked to see them and the manager's permission has been given.