

Royal Northern College of Music

Staff and Student Relationships Policy

Policy & Procedure

Department: Human Resources

**Document owner: Director of
Human Resources**

**Approval Committee: Executive
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RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC

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1. Purpose

This policy aims to protect staff and students in setting out the expectations and obligations that exist in relation to personal relationships, including those that are prohibited, to limit circumstances where a position of power may be abused.

This policy aims to ensure:

- That staff and students can work and study in a safe, positive, and supportive working and learning environment where everyone is treated fairly and professional boundaries are clear.
- the protection of staff members from allegations of actual or perceived conflict of interest, abuse, exploitation, favouritism, or bias.
- the protection of students from harm that may arise from entering into a relationship with a member of staff.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all members of staff as defined in Section 6 below.

This policy regulates the conduct of staff but applies to situations involving students. Students are not subject to disciplinary action under this policy; however, they are protected parties and may be involved in processes arising from it (for example, disclosures, risk assessments, and support arrangements).

3. Policy Statement and Principles

This policy comes into force on **1 March 2026** (effective date)

The policy was approved in February 2026 and applies to all relevant relationships on, or arising after, the effective date.

For the avoidance of doubt, this policy distinguishes between:

- **Prohibited relationships** – which must not occur and require immediate action.
- **Discouraged but declarable relationships** – which may proceed only following disclosure and risk mitigation; and
- **Pre-existing relationships** – which must be disclosed and assessed but are not automatically prohibited.

The Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) aims to provide a working and learning environment which enables staff and students each to realise their full potential and contribute to a vibrant and mutually supportive community. In doing so it seeks to ensure a positive and supportive working and learning environment where all are treated fairly.

The RNCM seeks to foster an inclusive, respectful, and professional community. Positive professional relationships between staff and students are a central part of supporting students' educational development and wellbeing. However, when relationships between staff and students become personal in nature, they may lead to actual or perceived imbalances of power or authority, conflicts of interest, exploitation, favouritism, or questions about consent. This can undermine trust and confidence in the academic process.

All staff are expected to act in accordance with the RNCM's Staff Code of Conduct and to promote a culture where inappropriate behaviour can be raised without fear of detriment.

4. Prohibited and Discouraged Relationships

4.1 Prohibited relationships

The RNCM **prohibits all intimate personal relationships** between a **relevant member of staff** and a student for **whom the staff member has, or is likely to have, direct or indirect academic or professional responsibility.**

Such relationships may undermine the integrity of supervision, assessment or professional judgement and may adversely affect the working and learning environment.

Intimate relationships are also **prohibited** between any member of staff and:

- any student who is under the age of 18; or
- any student who is an adult at risk,

regardless of whether the staff member is in a position of responsibility over them. Whilst a young person can consent to sexual activity once they reach the age of 16, the Sexual Offences Act (2003) makes it a criminal offence for a person to engage in sexual activity with a person under the age of 18, where the adult is in a position of trust.

4.2 Discouraged but declarable relationships

The RNCM **strongly discourages** any close personal relationship between a relevant member of staff and a student. Where such a relationship exists or develops, it **must be disclosed** so that a risk assessment can be undertaken and appropriate safeguards put in place.

5. Pre-existing and familial relationships

5.1 Pre-existing relationships

Pre-existing relationships are intimate or close personal relationships that:

- existed before this policy came into force and remain in existence; or
- existed before the staff member became a relevant member of staff in relation to the student.

Such relationships are not automatically prohibited but **must be disclosed** so that the RNCM can determine whether the relationship may continue with safeguards, or whether alternative arrangements or other action is required.

5.2 Familial relationships

The RNCM recognises that family relationships may exist either when a member of staff is appointed or when a student enrolls.

Such relationships may create actual or perceived conflicts of interest and must therefore be **disclosed** so that appropriate management measures can be implemented.

6 Definitions

Abuse of power: a situation where a **relevant member of staff** exploits a position of power in relation to a student 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**.

Adult at risk: a person aged 18 years or over who is, or may be, in need of community care services by reason of mental ill health or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation.

Close personal relationship: a relationship that excludes intimate relationships, but where the nature, content, emotional involvement and/or frequency of interactions and/or communications crosses the boundaries of professional conduct or may be reasonably perceived to do so.

Familial relationship: a relationship between individuals related by parental responsibility, family bonds, marriage, or civil partnership.

Intimate Relationship: a relationship involving physical intimacy (including sexual activity) and/or romantic or emotional intimacy.

Relevant member of staff: a member of staff who has, or is likely to have, direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct or indirect professional responsibilities, in relation to a student, including influence over:

- teaching, supervision, coaching, accompaniment, or répétiteur work.
- long-term artistic or career mentoring relationships.
- assessments, progression, repertoire, casting, auditions, performances, ensembles, competitions, or external opportunities; or
- professional services roles with authority over student support, safety, wellbeing or decision-making.

Where a member of staff has, or could reasonably be perceived to have, such influence in relation to a student, they will be considered a relevant member of staff for the purposes of this policy.

Sexual Misconduct: any unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape.

Staff: all individuals working for the RNCM under a contract of employment, as a casual paid worker or in roles granted staff privileges (including visiting academics). Graduate students undertaking teaching, pastoral or supervisory duties are covered in that capacity. Members of the Board of Governors and volunteers.

Student: any person registered on an undergraduate or postgraduate programme or other course arranged by or through the RNCM, including visiting and exchange students, applicants, and offer-holders. Former students are excluded unless they are current applicants or offer-holders.

7 Procedure

7.1 Relationships between relevant member of staff and students

A relevant member of staff **must not** enter into or pursue an intimate relationship with a student where the staff member has, or is likely to have, direct academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities.

Where such a relationship exists or is alleged to exist, the staff member **must immediately disclose** the relationship to the Director of Human Resources at human.resources@rncm.ac.uk. Disclosure does not imply that the relationship may continue.

Examples include but are not limited to a teacher or supervisor and their student, Graduate Teaching Assistant, and their student; academic or professional services colleagues expected to provide wellbeing support or safety provision to students as part of their role.

In order to maintain appropriate relationships with students, and to help reduce the risk of actual or perceived harm, abuse of power, exploitation, favouritism, bias or sexual misconduct, staff should:

- exercise self-reflection and ensure their behaviour best serves the student's experience.
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries with students and perform their duties in the best interests of the RNCM without favour towards any individual student over another student.
- not behave in a controlling or coercive way misusing their power or control over a student for financial, social, sexual, or other benefit.
- not make unwelcome sexual advances, suggestive behaviour or touching someone against their will or without their consent.
- not retaliate to allegations of inappropriate behaviour, including threatening/victimising those who have made the allegations, blocking access to career development opportunities.
- Communicate with students in a professional manner/style.

7.2 Disclosure of relationships

All relationships that require disclosure must be declared using the Staff/Student Relationships Declaration Form ([Appendix A](#)).

Where a staff member is in an intimate or close personal relationship with a student for whom they do not currently have responsibility, but where a reasonable risk of future conflict exists (for example, within the same School), the relationship must be disclosed.

Even where a staff member does not have, and is not likely to have, responsibility for a student, staff are strongly discouraged from entering into intimate or close personal relationships with any student. If such a relationship develops, it must be disclosed.

7.3 RNCM response to disclosure

Following disclosure, the RNCM will:

- undertake a written risk assessment.

- implement a formal management plan to remove or mitigate conflicts of interest; and
- make alternative arrangements for supervision, assessment, or support where necessary.

Such arrangements are preventative in nature and do not imply wrongdoing.

8 Confidentiality and student notification

Disclosures will be managed sensitively and shared strictly on a need-to-know basis.

Where it is necessary and proportionate to inform a student that a disclosure has been made, the nature and extent of the information shared will be determined by the Director of Human Resources, having regard to confidentiality, fairness, and safeguarding considerations.

Disclosure records will be kept securely on the staff member's personal file in accordance with data protection legislation and retained no longer than necessary.

9 Raising concerns

Any concerns about a colleague's behaviour should be reported to their Head of School/Department, the Director of Human Resources at human.resources@rncm.ac.uk or through the RNCM's online reporting tool '**Raise It**'.

Students may also seek confidential advice and support from appropriate student support services, including Academic Services, wellbeing or counselling services, or the Students' Union, independent of any disclosure made by a member of staff.

Individuals who raise concerns in good faith will not be subject to detriment.

10 Consequences of non-compliance

A breach of this policy may include, but is not limited to:

- entering into a prohibited intimate relationship.
- the development or existence of a relationship which is prohibited by law and/or this policy.
- failure to declare a relationship in accordance with this policy.
- failure to comply with any arrangements or requirements put in place following the declaration of a relationship.
- conduct constituting abuse of power or sexual misconduct.

Breaches will be addressed under the RNCM's Staff Disciplinary Procedure and may result in sanctions up to and including dismissal. The responsibility for a disclosure and compliance rests with the staff member.

11 Monitoring and review

The Human Resources Committee is responsible for monitoring and reviewing this policy to ensure legal compliance, alignment with sector best practice and the protection of staff and students.

12 Related Policies

- Dignity at Work
- Staff Disciplinary Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Sexual Misconduct Policy

ROYAL NORTHERN COLLEGE OF MUSIC

POLICY APPROVAL/REVIEW PROCESS

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AMENDMENTS SINCE DRAFT

ISSUE No	PAGE	DETAILS	DATE	ISSUED BY
1		First draft		Paul Hynes
2		Final – ready for publication		Paul Hynes

Approvals

This document requires the following approvals.

Name/Committee	Date	Version
Human Resources Committee	18 November 2025	1
Executive Committee	17 February 2026	1
Board of Governors	18 February 2026	2

Staff-Students Relationships Declaration Form
Part 1 (to be completed by member of staff)

 This form should be completed in accordance with the Staff and Student Relationship Policy

Personal Details:	
Name	Your name
Head of School/ Line Manager	Head or Manager's name
Position, School/Department	School or department
Student details:	
Name	Student name
School	School of study
Nature of Relationship: <i>Please provide details concerning the nature of the relationship, i.e. intimate, close personal, familial, etc., providing as much detail as possible.</i>	
Please provide details	
If this is an intimate relationship, when did it start (approximate month/year)	
Please provide details	
By submitting this form, I understand and agree that;	
It may be necessary for permanent or temporary adjustments to be made to any supervisory arrangements or other conditions, to remove any real or perceived conflict of interest arising from the relationship.	
This information will be stored securely and managed in compliance with data protection legislation.	
I have read and understood the Personal Relationships Policy	
Date: Date of completion	

 Please submit to human.resources@rncm.ac.uk addressed to the Director of Human Resources (DHR).

DHR will discuss the declaration with your Head of School/Line Manager and with you as necessary.

Part 2: (To be completed by HR Representative in conjunction with the Head of School/ Line Manager and member of staff).

Are alternative arrangements necessary	Select
If yes, please provide further details	
Details of agreed action /plan Details of action plan	
Has the student been informed of the disclosure	Select
Completed by (HR Representative)	HR rep name
HR Representative job title	HR rep job title
Completed with (Head of School or Department)	Head of School / Dept name
Job title	Job title
Date completed	Dated completed

This form will be saved securely to the employee's personal record.