

## Guidelines and recommendations for work-related asymmetrical relationships

Aarhus University has adopted guidelines for personal relationships, with the overall purpose initially defined as follows: “Aarhus University is a large workplace, and it will often be possible for staff and students with close personal relationships to carry out their separate functions at the university. With clear guidelines, we can provide the best possible framework for a good environment for work and study, characterised by trust and respect, in which doubts about the impartiality of staff do not arise.”  
<https://medarbejdere.au.dk/administration/hr/rekruttering-og-ansattelse/personlige-relationer>

As a continuation and clarification of these university guidelines, the following guidelines and recommendations for CC – which are identical to those for CAS except for minor linguistic adjustments – aim to foster a shared understanding of asymmetrical relationships between students and staff as well as between staff and managers. The goal is to prevent close personal relationships from negatively affecting the work environment. This paper focuses on work-related asymmetrical relationships, which may raise concerns about impartiality and the abuse of power. The overarching idea is that it is important to avoid situations in which one’s behaviour, due to a close relationship, could be perceived as an abuse of power.

### Principles for developing recommendations and guidelines for CC

- *Recommendations* serve as a general guide to establish the desired common understanding; *guidelines* are more binding, and violations may result in sanctions.
- Managers, supervisors and teachers have a special responsibility to act professionally and objectively in situations in which they are part of an asymmetrical (unequal) collaboration, relationship or power structure.
- It must be made clear that the roles of teacher and supervisor entail a position of power over students, including PhD students. This also applies even if the student in question is not currently enrolled in one of the teacher’s courses.
- Impartiality is compromised if a supervisor is in a personal relationship with one of their students. This may also apply to teachers in connection with, for instance, assessments.

### What is meant by a close personal relationship?

- Relationships with parents, siblings, children, a spouse or long-term partner, in-laws and nieces and nephews are by definition closely personal.



The memo's use of the term also includes stepchildren and other family members with whom the staff member regularly interacts, as well as close friendships or hostilities. Any sexual relationship is regarded here as a close personal relationship.

### Recommendations for close personal relationships between staff and students

- It is important to avoid situations in which one's behaviour could be perceived as an abuse of power due to a close personal relationship.
- The WPA advisory group and the management at CC recommend that staff (teachers, supervisors etc.) avoid close personal relationships with students (including PhD students) within their own subject area.
- If a staff member and a student enter into a relationship, it must be considered how this affects the working conditions, including teaching and exams – not only for the student but also, for example, for the student's class or year group or the staff member's collaboration with others.

### Recommendations for close personal relationships between staff and managers

- It is important to avoid situations in which one's behaviour could be perceived as an abuse of power due to a close personal relationship. The degree of asymmetry between managers and staff may vary, as there are many different types of management roles, such as research director, head of department etc. There is a significant asymmetry between tenured staff and temporary staff (such as assistant professors, postdocs etc.). Therefore, everyone in a management position should consider whether and how this plays a role with regard to close personal relationships. This includes considering how to ensure the necessary transparency with respect to close personal relationships at the workplace, particularly in processes involving employment, appointments and elections.

### Guidelines for close personal relationships between staff and students

In the case of close personal relationships between students and staff (teachers, supervisors etc.) from the same subject area, the immediate manager must be informed. If in doubt as to whether a relationship may be perceived as problematic, it is recommended to discuss the situation with the immediate manager.

- Staff may participate in social events with students, such as Friday bars, parties and other work-related social gatherings. Under these circumstances, staff members represent Aarhus University and are responsible for their own behaviour, including in connection with the consumption of alcohol.

- Examples:
  - An associate professor begins a relationship with their PhD student. In this case, the immediate manager must be contacted to arrange for a change of supervisor (due to a conflict of interest).
  - A staff member has had a short-term relationship with a student. It must be ensured that the staff member is not later involved in assessments or similar activities related to the student. Therefore, the head of department must be informed about the relationship and any issues that may arise due to a conflict of interest.
  - A staff member has had a long-term, close friendship with a student's parents and has thus also known the student well for a long time from personal contexts. In this case, the head of department must be informed so that it can be clarified whether the situation, for example, could raise doubts about the staff member's impartiality when assessing the student's work.

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### Guidelines for close personal relationships between staff and managers

In the case of close personal relationships between a manager and a staff member, the immediate manager at the next level must be informed if there are any doubts about impartiality, for example in processes related to employment, appointments and elections.

- Managers may participate in social events with staff. Under these circumstances, managers represent Aarhus University and are responsible for their own behaviour, including in connection with the consumption of alcohol.
- Examples:
  - A head of department is close friends with a staff member. In connection with the filling of a position, the head of department considers whether it could lead to problems in decisions regarding who participates in the appointment committee and process. The head of department contacts the head of school, which results in the head of department openly addressing this at a department meeting and proposing a solution. This means that inquiries may be made as to whether there is confidence in the proposed solution.
  - A PhD programme director begins a relationship with a student. The student in question is interested in applying for a PhD. In this case, the programme director is disqualified from participating in the assessment process, and a replacement must be found. This must be discussed within the department. Therefore, the head of department must be informed about the relationship.