



ICEP Personal Relationships and Professional Boundaries policy

Introduction and Purpose

ICEP Europe is committed to fostering a respectful, inclusive, and professional learning and working environment. In the context of a blended higher education institution, professional boundaries between staff and students are essential for maintaining academic integrity, student trust, and institutional credibility.

This policy sets out ICEP Europe's expectations regarding personal relationships between staff and students, and between staff members, where such relationships may give rise to actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The aim is to prevent abuses of power, ensure fair treatment for all students, and protect both staff and students from allegations of inappropriate conduct.

This policy also contributes to ICEP Europe's commitment to safeguarding, equality, and professional standards, and supports compliance with external regulatory expectations, including the Office for Students (OfS) Condition E6.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All ICEP Europe staff, including full-time administrative and academic staff, part-time tutors, contracted content developers, and other individuals engaged in academic or student-facing roles;
- All students enrolled in any ICEP Europe programme;
- Any third parties acting on behalf of ICEP Europe who have direct contact with students.

It covers:

- Personal relationships between staff and students, where a professional connection exists or may arise;

- Personal relationships between staff members, where the relationship may influence or be perceived to influence professional responsibilities or decision-making.

This policy does not apply to professional relationships that are conducted with transparency and integrity and where no conflict of interest is present. It also does not restrict informal collegial interactions that do not interfere with professional duties or institutional responsibilities.

Definitions

Personal Relationship is defined as:

- a family relationship; or
- a business/commercial/financial relationship; or
- a close friendship; or
- an intimate relationship (sexual and/or romantic), however brief.

Professional Relationship is defined as:

- an assessing, supervising, tutoring, mentoring, teaching role; or
- a pastoral role; or
- a collaboration on a project for the institution; or
- an administrative or technical support role.

Relationships Between Staff and Students

Personal relationships between staff and students where a professional relationship also exists—such as in teaching, supervision, support, or assessment—are strongly discouraged, due to the risk of perceived or actual conflict of interest, bias, or power imbalance.

Where such a personal relationship exists or develops, the staff member is required to formally disclose the relationship as a potential conflict of interest in line with ICEP Europe's Conflict of Interest Procedure. This must be done as soon as possible using the Conflict of Interest Declaration Form, submitted to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manager.

Upon receiving the disclosure:

- The form will be reviewed in accordance with ICEP Europe's Conflict of Interest Procedure;
- The situation will be recorded in the Conflict of Interest Register;

- Reasonable measures will be put in place to manage, mitigate, or eliminate any risk of bias, such as reallocation of teaching, assessment, or student support responsibilities.

While a personal relationship with a student does not automatically constitute misconduct, failure to disclose such a relationship where a conflict of interest exists may be treated as a breach of ICEP Europe's staff conduct obligations and may lead to disciplinary action.

Staff who are uncertain whether a relationship may present a conflict of interest are encouraged to seek guidance and, where in doubt, make a disclosure.

Relationships Between Staff Members

ICEP Europe acknowledges that personal or consensual intimate relationships between staff members are, in most cases, private matters. However, in a professional context, such relationships may give rise to actual or perceived conflicts of interest, especially where one party holds influence over another's professional responsibilities, decision-making, or working conditions. This includes both pre-existing relationships and those that may develop or end during employment at ICEP Europe.

All ICEP Europe staff are expected to avoid situations where personal relationships may compromise—or appear to compromise—professional judgement, fairness, or transparency. Staff members must not:

- Line manage, or be line managed by, a person with whom they have a personal relationship;
- Participate in decisions relating to recruitment, contract renewal, performance management, or disciplinary matters concerning someone with whom they have a personal relationship;
- Approve or authorise any financial payments, funding allocations, or expense claims on behalf of a person with whom they have a personal relationship;
- Be involved in any formal or informal decision-making processes (e.g. committee discussions, hiring panels, promotions) that relate to a person with whom they have a personal relationship.

Where a personal relationship exists or develops between staff members and may lead to a conflict of interest, the relationship must be disclosed without delay, using the Conflict of Interest Declaration Form. The completed form should be submitted to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manager.

Disclosures will be reviewed in accordance with ICEP Europe's Conflict of Interest Procedure, and appropriate actions will be taken to manage, mitigate, or eliminate the risk. This may include amending reporting lines, limiting involvement in certain decisions, or other proportionate measures. All disclosures will be treated confidentially and sensitively, and recorded in the Conflict of Interest Register.

Where a personal or intimate relationship between staff members ends, both parties are expected to continue acting in a professional and respectful manner. Personal disputes must not interfere with team cohesion, institutional operations, or the learning environment. Should difficulties arise, staff are encouraged to seek support from their manager.

Professional Boundaries and Conduct

All staff must maintain appropriate professional boundaries with students at all times. This includes:

- Use only ICEP Europe-approved platforms when communicating with students (e.g. Moodle, ICEP email account, ICEP telephone);
- Avoid using personal email addresses, personal phone numbers, or private social media accounts to contact students;
- Avoiding informal or inappropriate tone in written communications;
- Not offering or requesting personal favours;
- Not engaging in any behaviour that could be interpreted as coercive, favouritist, or sexual in nature.

Examples of inappropriate conduct include:

- Suggestive or flirtatious language;
- Repeated social invitations unrelated to academic duties;
- Excessive or preferential contact with a particular student;
- Offering to alter or influence grades or academic decisions for personal reasons.

Confidentiality and Support

All disclosures made under this policy will be handled sensitively and confidentially, and only shared on a strictly need-to-know basis.

Staff or students seeking advice on this policy may contact the Student Support Officer, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Manager, or the CEO for confidential guidance.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the QA&E Team, in consultation with the Senior Management Team. Amendments will be informed by legislative updates, sectoral good practice, and feedback from learners and staff.

Related ICEP Europe Documents:

- Conflict of Interest Procedure & Form
- Information Management and Data Protection Policy
- Code of Conduct