

Code for Relationships at work

1. Objective, definitions, and scope

Wherever people come together, private relationships and friendships may exist or develop in addition to professional relationships. The right to privacy and the freedom to choose friends and partners will always be respected in these relationships.

There may be circumstances in which the combination of a professional relationship and a private relationship or friendship may lead to integrity risks, such as conflicts of interest, sharing confidential information, penalisation, abuse of power, or (seemingly) unfairly obtained benefits. The integrity risk is increased when there are power dynamics in place, such as a private relationship between a manager and a subordinate or a private relationship between an employee and a student. For all parties involved, such situations are undesirable and sometimes even detrimental.

The objective of this code is to provide all WUR employees with information on how to deal with situations where professional relationships overlap with private relationships or friendships and any possible consequences.

Definitions

A **professional relationship** lies outside the private sphere and relates to achieving results and the organisation of the work.

A **private relationship** is a family relationship (up to 2nd degree) or a love relationship (even if it is dysfunctional or has ended).

Scope

This code applies to:

- Employees: those who have an employment contract in accordance with the CAO-NU or the CAO-WR at Wageningen University (WU) or Wageningen Research Foundation (WR), or who otherwise work under the responsibility of WU or WR: this also includes all PhD candidates with or without an employment contract at WU or WR;
- Students: student, future student, course participant, student solely taking exam(s), intern at WUR;
- Third-party employees who conduct work activities in or at WUR buildings or sites, including temporary and seconded workers.

This code does not apply to amicable relationships and family relationships beyond 2nd degree. If there is a family relationship from 3rd degree or an amicable relationship between employees and students or among employees, regardless of whether they have a hierarchical relationship to each other, those involved are asked to be alert of situations that pose an integrity risk, such as a

performance review, guidance and assistance, leadership, recruitment and selection, or close collaboration. WUR expects those involved to be able to make sound judgements in this regard. Transparency about the existence of an amicable relationship towards managers and colleagues is preferred.

In case of any inconsistency between the original Dutch version of this Code for relationships at work and the English translation the original Dutch version will prevail.

2. Relationships at work

This code applies to the following situations:

Private relationships between employees and students

A professional relationship between an employee and a student is always a relationship of power and dependency when the employee has a role in the support, assessment, and/or guidance and assistance of the student or if they can take decisions that may directly affect the student. The combination of a professional relationship and a private relationship between an employee and a student is not permitted.

An employee who has a professional relationship as well as a private relationship with a student must notify the manager of this private relationship. The manager respectfully ensures that dependencies in the professional relationship between lecturer and student are removed, so that the employee, in any case, does not have support and guidance duties in relation to the student in question, does not make decisions that affect the student, and does not evaluate the student.

Private relationships between employees in a hierarchical relationship

Private relationships between managers and subordinates are undesirable for the work relationship. The employee with the highest rank must report the private relationship to the manager who, if required, will consult with the higher manager. The managers should exercise discretion and respect the privacy of those involved in this.

After proper consultation with those involved, careful consideration of interests, and coordination with HR, the necessary actions will be determined. Transfer of either a person to another unit or department within WUR is the basis, unless the specific nature of the field does not allow for this. In that case, another appropriate solution will be sought such as managers making changes to their tasks and authorities. The manager of the group will ensure that the members of the group are informed.

If the private relationship results in a transfer, then this will be done with the intent to maintain the legal employment status. If no suitable tailor-made solution has been reached in consultation with those involved, this may lead to other measures within the framework of the applicable laws and regulations.

For additional provisions regarding private relationships between PhD candidates and PhD supervisors, co-supervisors, or members of the thesis committee, please refer to the Wageningen University Doctoral Degree Regulations.

<https://www.wur.nl/nl/show/promotiereglement-2022.htm>

Private relationships between employees without a hierarchical relationship

WUR expects two employees who not only have a professional relationship but also a private relationship to report this to their manager(s) as soon as this relationship may affect the professional relationship, organisational component, or organisation. WUR expects employees to be able to make sound judgements in this regard. If necessary, the manager can take measures such as organising work activities differently, avoiding close collaboration, and not assessing each other's work. The manager of the group will ensure that the members of the group are informed in a discrete and respectful way.

Private relationships between employees and external partners

Situations in which employees have a professional relationship and also a private relationship with an external partner of WUR may pose an integrity risk. A professional relationship means having an authoritative, evaluating, funding or supervisory role with regard to the external partner. This can include clients, collaboration partners, funding providers, or suppliers.

An employee who has a professional relationship and also a private relationship with an external partner must inform the manager of the existence of the private relationship as soon as it may affect the professional relationship. The manager should exercise discretion and respect the privacy of those involved in this. WUR expects the employee to be able to make sound judgements in this regard. If necessary, the manager can take measures, such as disconnecting the professional relationship between the employee and the external partner or re-assigning responsibilities and authorities temporarily or permanently for specific parts of the job.

3. Advice and support

Employees can contact an HR adviser or confidential counsellor for advice about integrity risks from private relationships and friendships at work.

Contact information for confidential counsellors: [Mediation and assistance - WUR Intranet](#)