

STAFF NOTICE 30 Workplace Relationships

AIMED AT	ALL FC STAFF
DATED	26 January 2007
CONTACT	HR Managers in Countries, Forest Research. HR Services Managers, Silvan House.

Purpose

1. This Notice introduces FC policy that married couples or partners (or people in another 'family' relationship, such as siblings) must not report on, or manage, each other.

Action

2. Staff Notices are sent out by email and copies are placed on the Intranet site. Managers are asked to ensure that staff without their own email access receive a copy of this notice.

3. Managers can seek further advice from Country HR Managers or from HR Services in Silvan House.

Kim P Lardge
Director HR
26 January 2007

STAFF NOTICE 30

Workplace Relationships

Introduction

1. Married couples or partners (or people in another 'family' relationship, such as siblings) must not report on, manage each other or sit on postfilling boards where their partner is a candidate. It is also recommended that, wherever possible, partners should not work in close proximity, for example in the same unit, section or branch.
2. This policy does not impact on staff in existing posts but if managers or individuals are aware of a current situation that they are concerned about, and are unable to resolve through discussion, the manager must consult with HR Services on what actions are required to mitigate the situation.
3. There is also a potential increased risk of fraud or financial impropriety as a result of workplace relationships. Finance and Accounting Services have guidance which does not allow partners to act as first and second signatories to the same payment. This is covered in the Money Matters Booklet 6 – Expenditure: Policy & Practice which is available on the Intranet. Further advice can be obtained from Mark Howells in FAS.

Definition

4. "Partners" means a couple, of whatever gender, who are in an established, close relationship. Family relationships would include siblings, parent/child etc. For the rest of this guidance 'partner' will be taken to cover all types of relationship.

General Principles

5. There are sound, common sense reasons for stipulating that one partner will not manage or report on another. It is difficult for an individual who has a strong personal relationship with another to deal with him/her impartially. Even if the manager feels that this is his/her approach others are always likely to see the relationship as affected by preferential treatment.
6. Whilst it may not always be possible to avoid individuals working in the same room or section, if this is a large open plan room, it is strongly recommended that this be avoided or can be arranged to mitigate the impact. Even if there is no management relationship, tensions between individuals in a close relationship can disrupt the smooth running of an office. It is often difficult for others involved to speak freely on some issues, for example within a team that includes partners.

Recruitment/Postfilling/Reorganisations

7. When planning team or unit changes, or planning to fill vacancies via trawls, managers must consider whether the changes would result in partners reporting on, managing or working in close proximity of each other. In addition to discussing any issues within the unit, managers can also seek advice from HR managers, before embarking on proposals that have a high chance of producing a problematic situation.
8. Applying for a role which would create a direct professional relationship, where there is currently a personal one, should be avoided or as a minimum must be discussed with the FDM/Conservator/Head of Division before a job application is made. If there is any doubt about

the appropriateness of a potential managerial reporting line, this must be discussed with HR before a job is advertised. Other options can and should be explored.

9. An individual's career development must not be set back by such moves; nor should there be an assumption that it should be the lower pay band individual of a relationship that has to be moved. The decision made must be arrived at by consensus and discussion and no presumptions made about the relationship or the action that might be needed.

Line Manager's Role

10. It is a requirement that line managers ensure that situations do not arise where claims can be made that personal relationships have affected objectivity and fairness of treatment. If line managers believe that there is a reason justifying a person being moved, they must discuss this with the FDM/Conservator/Head of Division. Discussion with the individuals should take place in order for opportunities to be given for practical suggestions/solutions.

Notifying a Relationship

11. It is expected that most partners will understand the reasons for FC policy in this area, which is in line with the policy of most employers. It is not in the interests of either partner in a relationship if, say, the objectivity of an annual report is questioned. Employees should also recognise the possibility of both distractions and tensions that can result from working in close proximity to a partner.

12. One of the partners is expected to take the responsibility for ensuring that his/her manager is aware if a close, personal relationship is developing that would fall within this policy.

HR Role

13. It is essential that HR is involved in any proposed transfer of a person so that all relevant factors are considered.

Kim P Lardge
Director HR
26 January 2007