



University of Bristol
Sexual Misconduct and Personal Relationships
Guidance

1. Overall aim

- 1.1 This guidance sets out the University's requirements and expectations regarding intimate relationships, including professional boundaries, between members of the University community. It is designed to safeguard professional relationships and protect students and staff from inappropriate behaviour which may include violence, abuse of power and trust, controlling/coercive and predatory behaviour, and sexual misconduct and exploitation.
- 1.2 It is aligned to the [Sexual Misconduct Policy](#) and should be read in conjunction with the related regulations, policies and procedures set out in Section 10.

2. Scope

- 2.1 For the purposes of this guidance:
- 2.2 *Intimate relationships* include all sexual or romantic contact, whether in person and/or online or via means of other electronic communication, one-off or longer-term.
- 2.3 A member of staff is defined as any individual either employed or engaged by the University on a paid or unpaid basis to carry out work for the University under any type of employment contract. This includes: ▪ Students undertaking paid or unpaid work. ▪ People designated as workers for the University including those engaged through the Temporary Staffing Service (TSS). ▪ Agency workers and Honorary appointments.
- 2.4 A student is any individual registered on a programme of study at the University, including summer school and short courses. Students may also be studying away from the University premises for part, or the whole, of their programme.
- 2.5 People working on a voluntary basis at the University and those working as contractors are also bound by the terms of this Policy as is any person engaged with, or representing, the University.
- 2.6 The University will encourage partner organisations, for example, the University of Bristol Students' Union to develop their own policies discouraging intimate relationships between staff members and students with whom they come into contact as part of their employment.

3. Sexual misconduct

- 3.1 Sexual misconduct covers a broad range of inappropriate, unwanted or attempted unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature as outlined in the [University Sexual Misconduct Policy and Definitions](#). Whilst detailing all the behaviour covered by the University policy would be impossible, the common thread is the disregard of informed consent. Consent is always required and cannot be assumed based on the parties' relationship status or sexual history together.

4. Staff-Student Relationships

- 4.1 The University believes that the professional boundaries associated with a relationship of trust and confidence that exists between a student and a member of staff is a central and essential part of a student's educational development and pastoral care. For that reason, and given the inherent imbalance of power between staff and students, the University discourages intimate relationships between its staff and its students.
- 4.2 Those who work for the University must not abuse their position in any way, including by making any form of sexual advance towards students, pressurising students into intimate relationships, or through any form of sexual harassment, coercive/controlling or predatory behaviour. This includes promising or alluding to rewards in return for sexual favours or suggesting or threatening withdrawal of academic support if sexual access is not granted. Such behaviour, which disregards professional boundaries, constitutes serious or gross misconduct and will be subject to disciplinary proceedings, the consequence of which can include dismissal from the University.
- 4.3 The University strongly discourages intimate relationships between staff and students since these risk compromising the trust and confidence that underpins the learning experience and may negatively impact on the student's educational development and pastoral care, and may constitute an abuse of power.
- 4.4 If an intimate relationship develops between a student and a member of staff, that both parties regard as consensual:
- The staff member **is required** to disclose this to their Head of School or Division, as appropriate. Failure to do so could result in disciplinary action being taken.
 - The student should also be encouraged to declare an involvement with a staff member to their Academic Advisor, Head of School or other senior person as soon as possible whether this is at any point during the relationship or after a relationship has ended.
 - Where a disclosure of an intimate relationship is made, the Head of School or Division (as appropriate) will ensure measures are put in place to prevent actual or potential conflicts of interest, while dealing with the matter in a manner that aims to protect the dignity and privacy of all parties. This will involve appointing a point of contact for the member of staff and student respectively. The member of staff and the student will be expected to comply with any reasonable decision or action.
 - If a member of staff becomes aware of an intimate relationship between a colleague and a student and is uncertain about what action to take, advice should be sought from their Faculty's or Division's HR Business Partner. If a member of staff has concerns that this relationship might involve coercion, predatory behaviour or constitute an abuse of power, they are encouraged to report their concerns to the Head of School or other senior manager as appropriate, who will liaise with HR to determine whether to initiate an independent investigation.

5. Reporting Channels

- 5.1 Where a student or staff member has experienced sexual misconduct within the last 7 days, we strongly encourage them to seek support without delay as there is a timeframe within which evidence can be gathered. Local sexual assault referral centres offer 24/7 support. If your experience of sexual misconduct is less recent you can still access the range of support available.

For staff members: Staff wishing to report another staff member should report to their line manager or HR Business Partner who can advise on how to proceed. Reports about

the behaviour of a staff member will normally be progressed through the University's [Conduct Procedure \(Ordinance 10\)](#).

Staff wishing to report a student should contact the Student Resolution Service by emailing srs-casework@bristol.ac.uk. Reports about the behaviour of a student will normally be progressed through the Student Disciplinary Regulations and Procedure.

For Students: Students wishing to report a student can [formally report](#) to the University. Students wishing to report a staff member can [report to the Student Complaints Team](#) and the relevant HR Team will be involved if the complaint is against an employee.

- 5.2 If an employee becomes aware of sexual misconduct between a colleague and a student or another employee, advice should be sought from their [HR Business Partner](#).
- 5.3 Sexual misconduct can also give rise to situations where there is coercive or predatory behaviour. If intimate relationships arise between colleagues and any person has concerns about any predatory or coercive element to such a relationship, they are encouraged to report or disclose this to their line manager, or other relevant senior manager, who is obliged to ensure that such reports are recorded. The senior manager will liaise with HR to determine whether to make arrangements for an investigation to be undertaken in accordance with the University's Conduct Procedure.
- 5.4 Any student who exerts sexual pressure over a member of staff, or who behaves in a coercive or predatory manner towards a member of staff, will be subject to the University's student disciplinary procedure, the consequences of which can include expulsion from the University. Staff who witness or experience any such behaviour should report concerns about inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature from students to their Head of School or other relevant senior manager. Students who witness any such behaviour should report the matter to an Academic Adviser or Head of School.

Please refer to the University [Sexual Misconduct Policy](#) for further details on making a disclosure.

6. Staff-Staff Relationships

- 6.1 The purpose of this part of the policy is to ensure that the University is able to exercise its duty of care to all staff in their relationships at work.
- 6.2 Intimate relationships between members of staff who have a supervisory or line management connection present a potential conflict of interest. Intimate relationships between members of staff where there is not a management connection, but where the nature of the roles undertaken results in close working relationships, may also present a conflict of interest. Close working relationships may, for example, involve a power dynamic and/or professional hierarchy that lies outside of a direct management connection.
- 6.3 If a relationship such as the ones described above develops, the staff members involved should report to their Head of School or Division, or other relevant senior manager, who is obliged to ensure that such reports are recorded. The University's Conflict of Interest Regulations should be adhered to in such situations.
- 6.4 Intimate relationships between members of staff can also give rise to situations where there is coercive or predatory behaviour associated with sexual misconduct. If intimate

relationships arise between colleagues and any person has concerns about any predatory or coercive element to such relationship, they are encouraged to report or disclose this to their Head of School, Division or Unit, or other relevant senior manager, who is obliged to ensure that such reports are recorded. The senior manager will liaise with HR to determine whether to make arrangements for an investigation to be undertaken in accordance with the University's staff disciplinary procedure, and disciplinary action may be taken.

7. Related Regulations, Policies and Procedures

- [Acceptable Behaviour Policy](#)
- [Acceptable Behaviour at Work Policy Statement and Guidance](#)
- [Conduct Procedure](#)
- [Conflict of Interest: Outside of Work Policy](#)
- [Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy](#)
- [University Sexual Misconduct Policy](#)
- [Student Disciplinary Regulations and Procedure](#)