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**Guidance on intimate personal relationships between staff and students**

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## Summary

* 1. The University’s policy position on intimate personal relationships between students and staff is set out in Section 7 of the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy (“the Policy”).
  2. The Policy is designed to set clear expectations around professional boundaries, protect the interests of staff and students, and prevent conflicts of interest and/or abuse of power as part of our commitment to foster a safe environment on campus.
  3. This Guidance document (“the Guidance”) provides detailed guidance, supporting members of staff and managers to understand their responsibilities in implementing the Policy.

## Staff-student relationships

* 1. The University:

1. Does not allow staff to enter into intimate personal relationships with students for whom they have academic or pastoral responsibility.
2. Does not allow staff to take on or assume academic or pastoral responsibility for a student with whom they are in an existing intimate personal relationship or with whom they previously had such a relationship.
3. Strongly discourages the formation of intimate personal relationships even where a member of staff does not have academic or pastoral responsibility for a student due to the inherent imbalance of power. Such relationships should be declared as outlined below.
   1. Any failure to comply with this policy will result in investigation under the Conduct or Acceptable Behaviours process.
   2. The Policy and Guidance comes into force from 1 August 2025.
   3. Some University staff are subject to specific professional standards or regulatory requirements due to their role or professional registration. Where such obligations apply, they take precedence over the provisions of this Guidance and the Policy.

## Scope

* 1. This Guidance applies to all students and staff of the University.
  2. For the purposes of this Guidance 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. This also includes students who have suspended their studies with the intention of returning.
  3. For the purposes of this Guidance 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:

1. Students undertaking paid or unpaid work.
2. People designated as workers for the University including those engaged through the Temporary Staffing Service (TSS).
3. Agency workers, Honorary appointments and Emeritus titles.

## Intimate relationships

* 1. An intimate relationship with a student includes:

1. Any sexual or romantic relationship, including one-off occurrences, whether conducted in person, online or through any other form of communication.
2. Any level of emotional intimacy which goes outside of the boundaries of professional conduct, or could reasonably be seen to do so.
   1. This is not intended to capture family relationships, although should consider whether such relationships might present the risk of a conflict of interest.
   2. In relation to emotional intimacy, staff should be able to respond empathetically and with compassion to students in distress. However, this should not include:
3. Any form of personal dependence, whether emotional, practical, financial or otherwise.
4. Format, content or frequency of communications which go beyond what is necessary to carry out their role. This could mean, for example, frequent communications to students not related to university business or visiting a student in their home.
5. Favourable or exceptional treatment compared to any other student.
   1. The list above is not intended to be exhaustive. If a member of staff is in doubt about these professional boundaries they should seek advice from their line manager and/or HR Business Partner (HRBP). Members of staff can also seek advice about supporting students effectively from our wellbeing teams, including by completing a [serious concerns form](https://enquiry.bristol.ac.uk/request-someone-support/).
   2. Understanding professional boundaries within staff-student relationships is covered in the Safeguarding and Risk Management training. Further guidance will be available on the [Knowledge Hub](https://uob.sharepoint.com/sites/staff-info/SitePages/knowledge-hub.aspx#teaching_and_student_support/student_support/staff_supporting_students/supporting_students'_health_and_wellbeing).

## Academic or pastoral responsibility

* 1. Academic or pastoral responsibility includes any teaching, professional, pastoral or administrative responsibility for or authority over a student, whether temporary or permanent. This includes but is not limited to:
  2. Delivering teaching, setting, marking and/or moderating assessments of any kind, or making academic decisions (for example, decisions around progression or degree outcomes). This includes students working in teaching support roles where this includes involvement in teaching or assessment beyond logistical support (e.g. the setting up and running of equipment).
  3. Acting as an academic personal tutor, senior tutor or equivalent role.
  4. Acting as a supervisor or co-supervisor for a postgraduate research student.
  5. Providing wellbeing or welfare support.
  6. Providing ongoing administrative support related to a student’s studies.
  7. Delivering coaching, instruction or therapeutic services.
  8. Acting in a senior role which involves the setting or enacting of institutional policy or process in relation to education or student wellbeing.
  9. Members of staff should also not enter into a relationship with a student where there is a predictable risk of a conflict of interest arising in the future. For example, this might include members of teaching staff starting a relationship with a taught student in the same school.
  10. Again, this is not intended to be an exhaustive list. The intent is that the Guidance covers any situation where the potential for conflict of interest and/or abuse of power may exist as a result of the formation of an intimate personal relationship. Where a member of staff is not sure they should seek advice from their line manager and/or HRBP.

## Disclosure of new relationships where staff do not have academic or pastoral responsibility

* 1. Even where a member of staff does not have academic or pastoral responsibility for a student, the University discourages the formation of intimate personal relationships (as defined above) due to the inherent imbalance of power.
  2. Where such a relationship develops, that both parties regard as consensual, **the member of staff must disclose this immediately using the form at Appendix A**. Wherever possible advice should be sought from their line manager and/or HRBP in advance of a relationship being formed.
  3. Members of staff must also disclose if someone they are already in a relationship with becomes a student.
  4. Following a disclosure, the relevant Head of School, School Manager, Divisional Head or any other relevant senior manager will ensure that any necessary actions are taken to safeguard against any potential conflict of interest or abuse of power.
  5. In some cases, a change of circumstances may mean that an existing relationship falls into the scope of prohibited relationships set out above – for example, a student changing course or a member of staff taking on a new role which means they take on academic or pastoral responsibility for the student. In these circumstances, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to highlight this change to ensure that appropriate mitigations can be put in place. Failure to do so will be considered as a potential misconduct issue under the appropriate policy.
  6. Once a disclosure has been submitted, the information will be passed to the relevant HRBP who will flag to the Head of School/School Manager/Divisional Head as appropriate who will determine what mitigations need to be considered. In some circumstances, the disclosure may not require follow up action.
  7. The requirement to disclose relationships does not apply to students working in temporary or casual roles at the university. However, students working in temporary roles must not enter into a relationship with another student where they have academic or pastoral responsibility and should notify their line manager of any existing conflicts of interest.

## Relationships formed before 1 August 2025

* 1. Any relationship between a member of staff and a student formed prior to the Policy coming into force on 1 August 2025, which may be ongoing or have come to an end, should already have been declared to the relevant Head of School, School Manager, Divisional Head or other senior manager.
  2. However (and regardless of whether a declaration has already been made) all existing relationships, and relationships which have come to an end within the last 12 months, must be re-declared in accordance with the Policy by **12th September 2025** using the form at Appendix A. Declarations should be submitted to the confidential mailbox as published in the guidance which will then be used to centrally record such disclosures.
  3. Following a disclosure, the relevant Head of School, School Manager, Divisional Head or any other relevant senior manager will be notified and ensure that any necessary actions are in place to safeguard against any potential conflict of interest or abuse of power.
  4. Where an intimate relationship ends it is expected that all parties will continue to conduct themselves in a professional manner in the University and avoid personal disputes which impact on the working environment or other colleagues and students. It may also be appropriate for some of the actions, put in place by the University during the relationship, to continue for a period of time following the end of the relationship. The staff members involved will be consulted and required to comply with reasonable actions.

## Raising concerns

* 1. Any member of staff who has concerns about a possible breach of the Policy, or becomes aware of a relationship that may not have been disclosed appropriately, can seek advice from their line manager or HR Business Partner.
  2. Students can raise concerns through the University’s [staff unacceptable behaviour](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/students/support/health/report-unacceptable-behaviour/how-to-report/#report-staff) process.
  3. If a relationship is identified that should have been disclosed but was not may be considered as a potential misconduct issue under the appropriate policy.
  4. To safeguard against malicious or vexatious reporting, all concerns will be assessed carefully and confidentially to determine any appropriate action. Where a report is found to have been made deliberately with the intention of causing harm or misrepresenting the facts, this may be considered as a potential misconduct issue under the appropriate policy.

## Support

* 1. Advice and support available to staff members:
* Union representatives (for union members) at University of Bristol branches of [Unison](https://unisonbristoluni.org.uk/), [UCU](https://www.ucubristol.org.uk/) or [Unite](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/Groups/unite/).
* [HR Business Partners:](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/hr/contact/) Support managers with acceptable behaviour cases.
* Line managers: Can offer advice and signpost to further support and resources.
* [Speak Up Stand Out advocates:](https://uob.sharepoint.com/sites/staff-info/SitePages/suso-advocates.aspx) Get informal advice and support around unacceptable behaviour, bullying or harassment.
* [Staff Counselling service:](https://uob.sharepoint.com/sites/staff-counselling) Staff on fixed term or open ended contracts can access the staff counselling service.
* [Employee Assistance Programme](https://uob.sharepoint.com/sites/staff-counselling/SitePages/get-help-out-of-hours.aspx): Provides free counselling and information services available 24/7 to all staff.
* Research Staff representatives (for Research staff only): Can offer advice and signpost to further support and resources.

## Confidentiality and Information Sharing

* 1. Maintaining confidentiality is paramount.
  2. Staff data is held and processed in accordance with the [staff fair processing notice](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/data-protection/policy/staff-processing-notice/).
  3. Student data is held and processed in accordance with the [Student Fair Processing Notice](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/secretary/data-protection/policy/students-processing-notice/) and [Education and Student Success Confidentiality Statement.](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/students/support/health/policies/student-services-confidentiality-statement/)

## Related Documents

* [Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/secretary/documents/student-rules-and-regs/sexual-misconduct-policy.pdf)
* [Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/hr/documents/policy/sexual-harassment-and-misconduct/Prevention%20of%20Sexual%20Harassment%20Policy.pdf)
* [Preventing Sexual Harassment Risk Assessment Guidance](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/hr/documents/policy/sexual-harassment-and-misconduct/Preventing%20Sexual%20Harassment%20Risk%20Assessment%20Guidance.pdf)
* [Acceptable Use Policy](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/policies/acceptable-use-policy/#email)
* [Mobile and Remote Working Policy](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/infosec/policies/mobile-and-remote-working-policy/#personal)

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Staff Declaration Form

**Staff Declaration Form (Student / Staff Relationships)**

*To be completed under the Harassment & Sexual Misconduct policy and guidance on intimate personal relationships between staff and students.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **SECTION A: TO BE COMPLETED BY MEMBER OF STAFF** | | |
| **Your Details** |  | |
| Name | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| Line Manager name | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| Position, Faculty, School | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| Head of School | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| **Relationship Details** |  | |
| Name of Student | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| Course | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| Level (UG/PGR/PGT) | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| School/Faculty | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| **Nature of Relationship** | **PLEASE OUTLINE BELOW** | |
| *Intimate Personal Relationship (please refer to guidance)* | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| *Other relationship that may give rise to conflict of interest* | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| Length of relationship (approx. month/year): | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| Please set out any potential conflict of interest | Click or tap here to enter text. | |
| **I understand the following:**  It may be necessary for permanent or temporary adjustments to be made to any supervisory arrangements or other conditions, to remove any real or perceived conflict of interest arising from the relationship.  This information will be stored securely and managed in compliance with data protection legislation and may be used for reporting purposes.  I have read and understood the University Harassment & Sexual Misconduct Policy.  I have read and understood the University guidance on intimate personal relationships between staff and students.  I understand the need to inform the University of the ending of the relationship.  Signature: Click or tap here to enter text.  Print Name: Click or tap here to enter text.  Date: Click or tap to enter a date. | | |
| **Completed form to be sent to** [E6relationshipdisclosure@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:E6relationshipdisclosure@bristol.ac.uk)  **Where required, the form will be sent to the Appropriate Manager who may discuss the form with the relevant HR Business Partner, with you or another party as necessary.** | | |
| **SECTION B: TO BE COMPLETED BY LINE MANAGER/HEAD OF SCHOOL** | | |
| **Are alternative/protective/mitigation measures necessary?** | | Y/N |
| **Please give full details of measures to be implemented, timeline for implementation and how this mitigates any potential conflict of interest.** | | Click or tap here to enter text. |
| **Has the student been informed of the declaration? If No, please explain why.** | | Y/N |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Section B completed by/date completed | Line Manager: Click or tap here to enter text. | Head of School / School Manager / Divisional Head: Click or tap here to enter text. | HRBP: Click or tap here to enter text. |