



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

**Staff and Students  
Relationships Policy:  
Supplementary Guidance**

July 2024

## Staff and Students Relationships Policy: Supplementary Guidance

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The [Staff and Students Relationships Policy](#) (hereafter 'the Policy') is intended to protect members of staff and students from misconduct and allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest by providing a framework of guidance and regulations and by ensuring appropriate safeguards and processes are in place to prevent abuses of power and sexual misconduct.
- 1.2. Positive professional relationships between members of staff and students are an essential part of supporting our students' educational development and ensuring their welfare whilst at the University. However, when relationships between staff and students become personal in nature, they may lead to actual or perceived imbalances of power or authority, accusations of bias or exploitation, and questions about the nature of consent. This can undermine trust and confidence in the academic process, impair academic progress and negatively affect the welfare of the student.
- 1.3. This Guidance is designed to help staff and students, including Heads of Institutions, in determining how the [Policy](#) should be implemented and provides further information about disclosure, staff responsibility and behaviours.
- 1.4. This Guidance should be read in conjunction with the [Policy](#) and does not form part of employees' terms and conditions of employment.
- 1.5. **Relevant staff members** are **prohibited** from pursuing or entering into an **intimate relationship** with any student for whom they have any direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities.
- 1.6. **Relevant staff members** are **strongly discouraged** from entering into a **close personal relationship** with any student for whom they have any direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities. When such relationships do occur, they must be declared so that an assessment can be made of any potential conflict of interest and influence.
- 1.7. Failure to comply with the [Policy](#) will be considered as a Disciplinary matter.
- 1.8. The terms in 1.5 and 1.6 are defined in [Section 3](#).
- 1.9. The [Policy](#) is not intended to restrict informal relationships between postgraduate students working closely in teams with other postgraduates, who are also employed as staff, or post-doctoral researchers, where the relationship between them is one of 'support' not 'responsibility.' See [Section 8](#).

## 2. Related Policies and Procedures

- 2.1. Links to related University policies, statements, sources of support and further information can be found below:
  - [Dignity at Work Policy](#)
  - [Conflict of Interest Policy](#)
  - [Children and Adults at Risk Safeguarding Policy](#)
  - [Employing and Working with Relatives Policy](#)
  - Disciplinary policies
    - All University Officers or Established members of staff should refer to [Schedule to Statute C, Chapter III](#) and [Special Ordinances under Statute C\(xiii\)](#)
    - [Unestablished Academic and Academic-related Staff \(including contract research staff\)](#)
    - [Unestablished Assistant Staff](#)

- [Breaking the Silence](#) (help and advice for anyone affected by harassment or sexual misconduct at the University)
- [Guidance on dealing with disclosures of sexual assault or sexual violence](#)
- [The Rules of Behaviour](#) for students
- [Student Complaint Procedures](#)
- [University Financial Regulations](#)

2.2. Where a member of staff's action places them in breach of this [Policy](#) and in breach of any applicable College policy, the member of staff may face disciplinary action under both University and College Disciplinary Procedures.

### 3. Definitions

- 3.1. **Abuse of power** is where a position of power or authority is used in an unacceptable manner. This can take various forms and may include, but is not limited to, grooming, manipulation, coercion and pressurising others to engage in conduct they do not feel comfortable with.
- 3.2. **Adult at risk** is someone aged 18 years or over who may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age, or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of themselves, or unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.
- 3.3. **Close personal relationship** excludes intimate relationships, but means a relationship where the nature, content, involvement and/or frequency of interactions and/or communications between a staff member and a student transgress the boundaries of professional conduct or may be reasonably perceived to do so.
- 3.4. **Grooming** is when a person builds a relationship with a child, young person or an adult who is at risk so they can abuse them and manipulate them into doing things. The abuse is usually sexual or financial, but it can also include other illegal acts.
- 3.5. **Head of Institution** includes Heads of Departments and of other academic Institutions, Chairs of Faculty Boards not divided into Departments, and the administrative Heads of Institution.
- 3.6. **Institution** means all academic and academic-related departments, including administrative units, libraries, museums, and any other person sections or units of the University.
- 3.7. **Intimate relationship** is a consensual relationship characterised by emotional, physical, and/or sexual intimacy, which may be conducted in person and/or online and/or via electronic or any other form of communication. This includes brief relationships and one-off occurrences, through to marriage or life partnerships, regardless of gender, gender identity or sexual orientation.
- 3.8. **Member of staff** includes any person working within the University under a formal contract of employment or as a casual worker or any person to whom the University offers any of the privileges or facilities normally available to its employees (such as visiting academics) or any individual working within the University under a contract for services and/or in a self-employed capacity. Where postgraduate students work for the University in a teaching, pastoral or supervisory capacity the [Policy](#) applies to them in that capacity as members of staff.
- 3.9. **Relevant staff member** means a member of staff who has direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, in relation to that student.

- 3.10. **Responsibility for a student** is defined widely and includes any teaching, professional, pastoral, or administrative responsibility or authority over a student, whether temporary or permanent, whether formally conferred on or voluntarily assumed by the staff member and whether the responsibility arises in a University or a college context. This includes but is not limited to lecturing, teaching classes or seminars, overseeing projects or fieldwork, supervising, and setting and/or marking of examinations or other assessments of any type. It also includes acting as a mentor or college advisor.
- 3.11. **Sexual Misconduct** means any unwanted or attempted unwanted conduct of a sexual nature and includes but is not limited to:
- (i) sexual harassment as defined by section 26(2) of the Equality Act 2010;
  - (ii) assault as defined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003;
  - (iii) rape as defined by the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- 3.12. **Student** includes any person currently studying for an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification, or on any course arranged by or through the collegiate University, including visiting and exchange students, applicants, and offer-holders. It includes students from other Higher Education providers who are completing placements at the University. It covers all students who are registered for a course even if their status is suspended but does not include former students who have finished their courses unless they are current applicants or offer holders for another University course.

#### 4. Disclosure

- 4.1. This Guidance supports Heads of Institutions with notifications that they may receive through the [Staff and Students Relationships Policy](#) (referred to as the Policy). It does not cover all scenarios and it is recommended that advice is sought from the relevant [HR Business Partnering Team](#).
- 4.2. Heads of Institution may receive notifications in relation to the [Policy](#) from members of staff, students or third parties. Notifications may be in conformity with the [Policy](#), or in respect of an allegation that the [Policy](#) has been breached, or both.
- 4.3. Any member of staff or student who has questions about the [Policy](#) and its application may also raise them with their Head of Institution in the first instance. Advice can also be sought from the relevant [HR Business Partnering Team](#).
- 4.4. A Relevant staff member **must** make a disclosure where there is, or has been, any close personal relationship, or where such a relationship arises, between a Relevant staff member and a student, where there are direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, in relation to that student.
- 4.5. The disclosure must be made to the member of staff's Head of Institution or equivalent post-holder or, if the member of staff would prefer, to a senior member of the HR Division, who will speak to the Head of Institution or equivalent post-holder on their behalf.
- 4.6. The disclosure should be made using the Declaration form (SSR) at [Annex 1](#) and confirmation of any action taken confirmed to the member of staff in writing, with a copy of the letter retained on the staff member's personnel file.
- 4.7. Consideration should also be given as to whether a declaration is required under the [University-Wide Conflict of Interest Policy](#).
- 4.8. If a member of staff is unsure whether or not a relationship with a student should be disclosed under the [Policy](#), the member of staff **should disclose it so**

consideration can be given to whether appropriate measures are needed to protect all parties.

- 4.9. In the event that any member of staff is, or becomes, aware of a relationship which ought to be, but has not been, disclosed or is prohibited under the [Policy](#), they are encouraged to notify the relevant Head of Institution or equivalent post-holder or, if the member of staff would prefer, to a senior member of the HR Division, who will speak to the Head of Institution or equivalent post-holder on their behalf.

## 5. Action by Head of Institution

- 5.1. Following receipt of a disclosure, the Head of Institution or equivalent post-holder will ensure as appropriate that the student is aware of the disclosure and that any appropriate alternative arrangements are put in place to avoid the member of staff having any professional connection with the student.
- 5.2. In all circumstances the Head of Institution or equivalent post-holder will deal with the situation in a manner that protects the privacy of all parties and may seek advice on a confidential basis from local institutional HR and/or the relevant [HR Business Partnering Team](#).
- 5.3. Those involved will be expected to comply with any decision, action and/or steps taken.
- 5.4. It is expected that any alternative and/or protective measures will have the effect of avoiding conflicts of interest by ensuring the member of staff ceases to have, or does not acquire, any responsibility for the student. This may involve any of the following:
  - a. acknowledging receipt of the disclosure in writing, and signposting the member of staff to support that may be helpful;
  - b. treating the notification in confidence as far as is possible;
  - c. consulting with the member of staff and the student to identify any impact their relationship may have, or may already have had, within the institution, wider University and potential impact on other staff and students;
  - d. re-organising the member of staff's duties to ensure they are not teaching, supervising, tutoring, mentoring, assessing, examining, providing welfare/pastoral support or participating in administration or management of any activities in which the student is involved;
  - e. the member of staff withdrawing from writing references and recommendations, or being involved in any decision concerning admissions, awards/prizes, scholarships, or bursaries for the student;
  - f. considering whether they should notify the member of staff's College.

## 6. Next Steps

- 6.1. After any alternative arrangements and/or protective measures have been put in place, the Head of Institution should consider whether any further actions might be necessary, which may include:
  - a. ensuring that any people affected are aware of the University's support services;
  - b. where there is a failure to comply with the [Policy](#) and/or arrangements put in place, taking appropriate action under the relevant [Disciplinary procedures](#);

- c. maintaining appropriate records and making sure that any relevant correspondence between the Head of Institution and member of staff is saved on the person's personnel file; and
  - d. learning lessons for the future, for example, if the disclosure has raised any concerns about appropriate boundaries in the Institution, considering interventions such as training.
- 6.2. There may be exceptional circumstances where it is difficult to avoid a member of staff having or maintaining some responsibility for a student even though a close personal relationship has arisen and been declared. For example, where a student is conducting research in a very specialist area and/or where no supervisor is available. In such circumstances, the Head of Institution or equivalent post-holder shall consider engaging an external supervisor, and a non-specialist co-supervisor, at no additional cost to the student, to ensure that the student and other students are treated equitably and consistently.
- 6.3. Under no circumstances may a Relevant staff member who is involved in, or has had an intimate relationship with a student, take on, or continue in any supervisory or tutoring role for them, even if the relationship predated introduction of the [Policy](#) and was declared within the Policy timescales.

## 7. Staff Responsibility for a student

- 7.1. Intimate or Close personal relationships between students and staff who have responsibility for them can cause significant problems because of the imbalance of power and authority in the relationship. These relationships can also disrupt the teaching and learning environment for other students and colleagues and lead to accusations of favouritism, exclusivity, bias, or exploitation and may undermine trust in the academic process. Staff members may find themselves the subject of concerns and scrutiny of their professional, academic and personal integrity.
- 7.2. A 'Relevant staff member' is intended to capture any member of staff, employed, or contracted by the University, who has direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, for a student.
- 7.3. The reference to 'academic responsibilities' includes, but is not limited to, teaching classes or seminars, lecturing, supervising, assessing students work, setting and/or marking of examinations or other assessments of any type.
- 7.4. The reference to 'professional responsibilities' is intended to capture all staff with a direct professional, pastoral or administrative responsibility or authority over a student, whether temporary or permanent, whether formally conferred on or voluntarily assumed by the staff member and whether the responsibility arises in a University or a college context. This also includes acting as a mentor or college advisor.
- 7.5. Situations where a Relevant staff member will have direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, in relation to a student include but are not limited to:
  - a. any direct supervisory or teaching relationship (for example between tutors and their tutees, postgraduate students and their supervisor);
  - b. a member of staff having direct or indirect responsibility for a student's academic studies (for example, Head of Department, Director of Studies, assessor of a student's work);
  - c. a member of staff has direct or indirect responsibility for that student's personal welfare (for example providing student welfare services or acting as a mentor or College advisor);
  - d. a member of staff has a mentoring role or ongoing administrative responsibility for a student; or

- e. a member of staff is involved in the admission or selection of applicants or offer-holders.

## **8. Guidance on boundaries between support and responsibility**

8.1. Where an individual is a student and a staff member, such as a research student teaching undergraduate students or acting in a supervisory capacity; that individual could also be captured by the definition of a 'Relevant staff member' where they have direct or indirect academic responsibility, or other direct professional responsibility, for a student.

8.2. It is recognised that in many institutions postgraduate students may work closely in teams with other postgraduates, who are also employed as staff, or post-doctoral researchers, where the relationship between them is one of 'support' not 'responsibility.' In science subjects research students typically work in the Laboratory full-time alongside employed staff and are regarded as full members of the research group. It is usual for all members of the group to learn from each other, keep an eye on each other, especially for safety reasons and discuss their work in informal settings as well as formal presentations.

The [Staff and Students Relationships Policy](#) is not intended to restrict these informal relationships which are valuable both for the student's learning and the research group's overall productivity. Some examples are:

- A senior PhD student or a post-doctoral researcher who is a member of staff, assists a more junior PhD student to safely use equipment, learn techniques or to conduct experiments without having responsibility or direction over their teaching, progress or in the assessment of their research.
- PhD students and post-doctoral researchers in the same research group who are pursuing research in related areas who liaise closely about progress and best practice and/or share accommodation and socialise together.
- Friendship between PhD students and post-doctoral researchers in the same institution where the member of staff has no responsibility for that student's academic progress, teaching, supervision, welfare or for any administrative decisions that affect them.

8.3. However, it is not acceptable for postgraduate students who are engaged (e.g. paid Demonstrator duties) to carry out structured teaching, learning and assessment activities, to have intimate relationships with students that they have a direct and ongoing responsibility for.

8.4. Where a relationship arises in such circumstances as listed in 8.2 and there is a reasonable risk that conflicts of interest might arise now or in the future, members of staff are encouraged to notify their Head of Institution or equivalent post-holder. This is to ensure appropriate measures can be considered and avoid the member of staff being given, or assuming, any future responsibility for the student. Roles evolve over time and members of staff must consider the possibility that what may have originally started as a support function could change into one of responsibility.

## 9. Professional behaviour between members of staff and students

### 9.1. Code of Behaviour

9.1.1 All staff are expected to act in line with the University [Code of Behaviour](#), which sets out the University's expectations around how we should and should not behave towards other members of our community. Whilst all aspects of the Code are applicable in the context of staff interactions with and conduct towards the student community, there are some aspects that are particularly relevant in the context of the [Staff and Students Relationships Policy](#). Sections 9.1.2 and 9.1.3 below set out these particular behaviours and provide non-exhaustive examples of behaviour that is prohibited under the Code in the context of this [Policy](#).

9.1.2 In line with the provision of the [Staff and Students Relationships Policy](#), it should be noted that the Code states staff should always strive to:

- **Maintain appropriate and professional relationships with all members of the University, in particular students and those in subordinate positions to us.**
- **Foster a trusting environment that enables honest and supportive working and studying conditions.**
- **Honour the need for confidentiality when the nature of our work requires it.**
- **Promote a culture where colleagues can speak out about inappropriate behaviour.**

9.1.3 The Code further states that, to maintain a culture of courtesy and professionalism, staff **must never** bully, harass, discriminate, victimise or commit sexual misconduct, by avoiding behaviour that includes:

- **Imposing overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision or management** (such as contacting students outside of reasonable working hours).
- **Undermining the reputation of others through malicious rumours or false allegations or by breaching confidential conversations.**
- **Behaving in a controlling or coercive way**, such as
  - Misusing their power or control over a student for financial, social, sexual, or other benefit.
  - Promising or alluding to rewards in return for sexual favours.
  - Suggesting or threatening the withdrawal of teaching or other forms of academic support if sexual access is not granted.
  - Using coercive behaviour or forcing a student/s to take part in sexual acts of any kind, or behaving in a way that uses unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- **Circulating or displaying any type of communication on any form of media that would otherwise constitute a form of inappropriate behaviour contrary to the [Dignity at Work Policy](#).**
- **Making unwelcome and unpermitted sexual advances, suggestive behaviour or touching someone against their will or without their consent, even if it is perceived as harmless by the individual behaving this way.**
- **Retaliating to allegations of inappropriate behaviour, including threatening those who have made the allegations, providing unfair or misleading references, or blocking access to career development opportunities.**

### 9.2. Guidance on Professional Behaviour

In general, where members of staff have a primary role of providing supervision, teaching or pastoral support, they should consider in advance how and where they interact with students, in the light of the context and objective of the interaction, the individuals concerned, and any pre-agreed preferences.

Factors that might be taken into consideration for example are the location of a meeting, the set-up of a meeting room; the timing of communications and/or the discussion of any personal information. A coffee shop may, for instance, be an appropriate place to discuss a positive scientific development with a PhD student but would be less appropriate for a pastoral conversation with an undergraduate stressed about their exams. An armchair discussion may be appropriate for a pastoral chat, but discussions at a desk might work better for a supervision.

**To further assist all staff in maintaining professional and appropriate relationships with students, it is recommended that staff should:**

### **Communications**

- 9.2.1 Maintain appropriate physical and emotional distances from students and perform their duties in the best interests of the University.
- 9.2.2 Wherever possible, communicate with students via University accounts linked to their role; for example, using University email addresses, telephone numbers, and/or MS Teams accounts.
- 9.2.3 Give careful consideration before sharing personal mobile phone numbers, particularly with an undergraduate student. It is recognised that sometimes this may be unavoidable; for example, when arranging and taking part in conferences or field trips. The use of personal social media accounts in this context should also be avoided.
- 9.2.4 Keep in mind that any communications with students and/or colleagues about a particular student may be disclosed to that student or their legal representative under data protection law.
- 9.2.5 Consider communication style and language; avoid 'banter', which may be considered inappropriate, confusing, or intimidating by others.
- 9.2.6 Be mindful when using social media; whilst this may provide a helpful platform on which staff can share, collaborate and network, it may also blur professional boundaries. Both the University's Code of Behaviour and the advice in this Guidance apply to any form of media.

### **Pastoral support**

- 9.2.7 Ensure students with support needs are referred to a relevant University support service and limit roles in providing personal support to a student where this is not part of official employment duties.
- 9.2.8 Not seek personal information from a student unless required for a University process, such as a counselling referral, medical information required for special consideration, or personal circumstances information as part of an academic progress process. Any information obtained this way must be stored and retained in accordance with local/institutional data protection requirements.

### **Spaces**

- 9.2.9 Ensure spaces are designed, including College rooms and offices to remind that this is a formal place of work or study.
- 9.2.10 Avoid inviting a student to their private home, room, or vehicle, especially if others are not present, or visiting a student in their home or room, including while at conferences, overseas trips, or on a placement. However, it is recognised that it is acceptable common practice for students working as part of research groups, as is normal in science laboratories, to be invited to attend group social gatherings at an academic member of staff's private home, for example a summer BBQ or other similar event that is open to all in the group.

### **Boundaries**

- 9.2.11 Not give undue special attention to a particular student over another or demonstrate any behaviour that could be interpreted as grooming.

- 9.2.12 Avoid accepting gifts from a student other than low value items or any gifts of a personal nature and giving gifts, other than low value items, that are solely for academic purposes, e.g., a published Academic text.
- 9.2.13 Not engage students to work in their home, for example dog walking, child minding, house sitting etc.
- 9.2.14 Not purchase transactional sex from any student.

**Annex 1: [Staff Declaration Form \(SSR\)](#)**

To be completed in conjunction with the [Staff and Student Relationships Policy](#).

<b>SECTION A: TO BE COMPLETED BY MEMBER OF STAFF</b>	
<b>Your Details</b>	
Name	
Line Manager name	
Position, Institution	
School/Non-school institution	
<b>Student's details</b>	
Name	
Course/Institution	
College	
<b>Nature of Relationship</b>	
<i>Close Personal</i>	
<i>Intimate*</i>	
<i>*6.3 of the <a href="#">Policy</a></i>	
Length of relationship (approx. month/year):	
<p><b>I understand the following:</b></p> <p>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.</p> <p>This information will be stored securely and managed in compliance with data protection legislation.</p> <p>I have read and understood the <a href="#">University Staff and Student Relationships Policy</a>.</p> <p>I have read and understood the <a href="#">University's Dignity at Work Policy</a>.</p> <p>I have read and understood the <a href="#">University wide Conflict of Interest Policy</a>.</p> <p>Signature:</p> <p>Print Name:</p> <p>Date:</p>	

**Completed form to be sent to line manager/Head of Institution who may discuss the form with the relevant HR Business Partnering team, with you and other party as necessary.**

<b>SECTION B: TO BE COMPLETED BY LINE MANAGER/HEAD OF INSTITUTION</b>	
<b>Are alternative/protective measures necessary? (<a href="#">section 5</a>)</b>	Y/N
<b>Please give further details</b>	
<b>Has the student been informed of the declaration?</b>	Y/N
<b>Has the College of the member of staff been informed of the declaration?</b>	Y/N
<b>If a plan has been put in place, has the College of the member of staff/student been informed?</b>	Y/N
<b>Please provide further details</b>	

	Line Manager	Head of Institution	Lead/ HR Business Partner
Signature			
Print name			
Role title			
Date			

**Lead HR Business Partner to send a copy to member of staff and Head of Institution and upload this form securely to the staff member's personnel file.**