

University of Bristol
SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND RELATIONSHIPS POLICY

1. Overall aim

- 1.1 This policy 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.

2. Scope

- 2.1 For the purposes of this policy:
- 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 *Member of staff* refers to any individual either employed or engaged by the University to carry out work for the University. It includes doctoral research students when working as tutors.
- 2.4 *Student* refers to any individual studying on any course of study at the University, including summer school and short courses.
- 2.5 The University will encourage *partner organisations*, for example, the University of Bristol Students' Union, and external contractors, to develop their own policies discouraging intimate relationships between staff members and students with whom they come into contact as part of their employment.
- 2.6 This Policy should be read in conjunction with the [Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy](#).

3. Sexual misconduct

- 3.1 Sexual misconduct covers a broad range of inappropriate, unwanted, behaviour. From the most severe forms of sexual violence including rape and sexual assault, it also extends to unwanted touching, stalking, abusive or degrading remarks and across the vast range of inappropriate behaviour in between. Whilst detailing all the behaviour covered by this 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 involves recognition of 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 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 in some circumstances 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 is 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 Adviser. 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.
 - The person to whom the relationship is disclosed and reported will report it as detailed below.

5. Reporting Channels

- 5.1 Any member of the University is encouraged to formally report cases of sexual misconduct whether they are the recipient of the behaviour or are witness to it as soon as reasonably practicable.

Reporting Channels for Employees

- 5.2 Employees should make a complaint to their Head of HR Business Partnering or HR Officer who can advise on how to proceed. <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/hr/contact/> Complaints will normally be progressed through the University's Conduct Procedure (Ordinance 28) [Conduct Procedure \(Ordinance 28\) | Human Resources | University of Bristol](#). The Student Complaints Officer will be notified by the HR Team if the complaint is against a student and will progress the complaint through the Acceptable Behaviour

Policy for Students <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/applicants/media/policy-documents/2018/undergraduate/acceptable-behaviour-policy.pdf>, the Student Complaints Procedure <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/secretary/documents/student-rules-and-regs/student-complaints-procedure.pdf> or under the Student Disciplinary Regulations <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/secretary/documents/student-rules-and-regs/student-complaints-procedure.pdf>.

5.3 If an employee becomes aware of sexual misconduct between a colleague and a student or another employee, advice should be sought from their HR Manager or HR Officer <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/hr/contact/>.

5.4 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 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.

Reporting Channels for Students

5.5 Any student complaint relating to sexual misconduct, including witnessing such behaviour, should be made to the Student Complaints Officer via the Acceptable Behaviour Policy <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/secretary/documents/student-rules-and-regs/student-complaints-procedure.pdf>. The relevant HR Team will be involved if the complaint is against an employee. <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/hr/contact/>

5.6 In any cases of inappropriate, coercive or predatory behaviour of a sexual nature by a member of staff, including promising or alluding to rewards in return for sexual favours or suggesting or threatening withdrawal of teaching or other forms of service or academic support if sexual access is not granted:

- Students are encouraged to report any such behaviour they witness or experience to either their Wellbeing Advisor, the Student Complaints Officer, their Academic Adviser, Head of Department or Head of School. All such reports will be treated in confidence, and the student's anonymity will be protected wherever possible.
- Action will be taken against the member of staff in accordance with the University's staff disciplinary procedure.
- 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.

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 (6.2) 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. Student-Student Relationships

- 7.1 The University does not seek to regulate relationships between students. However, students are reminded that a failure to demonstrate respect for the University, its staff, fellow students and the wider community and that causing actual or potential distress or harm to others may constitute a breach of the student disciplinary code.

Note

The University would like to acknowledge and thank the University of Sussex for allowing the University of Bristol to use their policy framework.

Other relevant policies

[Prevention of Sexual Harassment Policy](#)

[Acceptable Behaviour in the Workplace Policy](#)

[Conflict of Interest Regulations](#)