

University of Sussex Relationships Policy

Overall aim

This policy sets out the University's expectations and requirements regarding intimate relationships 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 exploitation.

Scope

For the purposes of this policy:

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.

Member of staff refers to any individual either employed or engaged by the University to carry out work for the University. It includes doctoral researchers when working as tutors.

Student refers to any individual studying on any course of study at the University, including summer school and short courses.

The University will encourage *partner organisations*, for example, the University of Sussex Students' Union (USSU) and Sussex Estates and Facilities (SEF), 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.

1. Staff-Student Relationships

1.1 The University believes that the professional 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. 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 teaching or other forms of academic support if sexual access is not granted. Such behaviour constitutes serious or gross misconduct and will be subject to disciplinary proceedings¹, the consequence of which can include dismissal from the University.

1.2 Given the inherent imbalance of power between many staff and students, the University discourages intimate relationships between its staff and its students. Such relationships could compromise 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.

¹ Under Regulation 31: staff disciplinary procedure, details of which can be found at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ogs/govdocuments/regulations>

1.3 If an intimate relationship develops between a student and a member of staff, that both parties regard as consensual:

1.3.1 The staff member is required to disclose this to their Head of Department, School or Unit, as appropriate. Failure to do so could result in disciplinary action² being taken.

1.3.2 The student is encouraged to declare an involvement with a staff member to their Academic Advisor, Head of Department, or Head of School as soon as possible whether this is at any point during the relationship or after a relationship has ended.

1.3.3 The Head of Department, School or Unit (as appropriate) will inform their School's or Division's HR Business Partner. The HR Business Partner will inform the Director for Student Experience (DfSE) (or delegated nominee). The DfSE will ensure measures are put in place to assess any potential vulnerabilities for the student arising as a result of the intimate relationship. The appropriate measures can be discussed between the Head of Department, School or Unit (as appropriate), HR Business Partner and DfSE, with DfSE authorising the agreed measures in order to discharge the University's duty of care more widely in relation to the student. It may be required, as appropriate, that it is referred to the Safeguarding (Case) Panel for consideration.

1.3.4. Where a disclosure of an intimate relationship is made, the Head of Department, School or Unit (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.

1.3.5. 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 School's or Division's HR Business Partner. If a member of staff becomes aware of an intimate relationship between a member of staff and a student, and 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.

1.4 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:

1.4.1 Students are encouraged to report any such behaviour they witness or experience to 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.

1.4.2 Action will be taken against the member of staff in accordance with the University's staff disciplinary procedure³.

² See footnote 1

³ See footnote 1

⁴ Under Regulation 2: Student discipline, details of which can be found at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ogs/govdocuments/regulations>

1.5 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 procedure⁴, 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 their Academic Adviser, Head of Department or Head of School.

2. Staff-Staff Relationships

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.

2.1. 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.

2.2 If such a relationship develops, the staff members involved must report to their Head of School, Division or Unit, or other relevant senior manager, who is obliged to ensure that such reports are recorded. The University's Policy on registration and declaration of interests⁵ should be adhered to in such situations.

2.3. Intimate relationships between members of staff 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 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 procedure⁶, and disciplinary action may be taken.

3. Student-Student Relationships

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/or causing actual or potential distress or harm to others may constitute a breach of the student disciplinary code.

Review / Contacts / References	
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Policy owner:	Human Resources
Lead contact / author:	Director of HR

⁵ Available at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/ogs/policies/goodconduct/declarationofinterests>

⁶ See footnote 1