

Owner:	xx
Version number:	1.0
Date of approval:	July 2025
Agreed by:	UET, noted by FRC
Due for review:	May 2026 or earlier if required.

Title: **STAFF STUDENT RELATIONSHIP POLICY**

Audience: Staff and Students

1. Scope

1.1 Positive professional relationships between staff and students are an essential part of supporting students' educational development and ensuring their welfare whilst at Bournemouth University (the University). However, intimate or close personal relationships where a power imbalance exists, such as between a staff member and a student they teach or supervise, can give rise to real or perceived conflicts of interest or abuse of power.

1.2 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 policy sets out the University's approach to personal relationships between staff and students, in order to ensure a positive, safe, respectful, and inclusive academic environment. The policy applies to all staff (as defined in section 2, whether academic, professional services, or visiting).

1.4 Particular provisions are set out for those members of staff who have direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, in relation to a student (referred to as 'relevant staff members' in this policy). Students should be aware of this policy and the terms and requirements placed on members of staff.

1.5 This policy and its procedures apply to all university employees including hourly paid lecturers, agency workers, self-employed contractors, staff on fixed term contracts and students who are also employees, regardless of sexual orientation or identity.

1.6 This policy also supports the University's compliance with Condition E6, an ongoing registration requirement introduced by the [Office for Students](#) (OfS), which mandates higher education providers in England to take all reasonable steps to protect students from harassment and sexual misconduct.

2. Definitions

Staff: Any person employed by or representing the institution, including academic staff, administrative staff, visiting lecturers, researchers, and PhD supervisors. For the purposes of this document 'staff' does not include contractors or staff employed by a third party, for example security guards, Chartwells staff.

Relevant staff member: A member of staff who has direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional responsibilities, in relation to that student.

Student: Any person enrolled in a course of study or research at the institution.

Personal or intimate relationship: The OfS defines an '**Intimate personal relationship**' as a relationship that involves one or more of the following elements: physical intimacy including isolated or repeated sexual activity; or romantic or emotional intimacy.

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.

Professional relationship: Any interaction between a staff member and a student in which the staff member has authority or influence over the student's academic progress, support, or assessment.

Abuse of power. OfS for the purpose of E6 define Abuse of Power as:

'a situation where a relevant staff member exploits a position of power in relation to a student so as to apply pressure in a way which:

- may result in the student doing something, or refraining from doing something, that they may not have otherwise done;
- and that action or inaction could reasonably result in something that falls within the scope of an intimate personal relationship.

Vulnerable Adult/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.

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. Policy position

3.1 The University has a legal, regulatory and ethical responsibility for all of its students and is committed to fostering a culture of trust, integrity and mutual respect. Personal relationships between staff and students can give rise to actual or perceived power imbalances, conflicts of interest and risks to student welfare.

3.2 To manage these risks appropriately, the following provisions apply:

- **Intimate personal relationships between staff and students are prohibited where there is direct academic, supervisory, or pastoral responsibility.** There are limited exceptions which are further defined in Section 6.
- **Members of staff must not enter into an intimate personal relationship with:**
 - **any student under the age of 18, or**
 - **any student who is an adult at risk,** irrespective of whether the member of staff has any responsibility for the student or other person.
- **Any existing relationships prior to the policy commencement date must be declared promptly,** in accordance with section 5, so that any appropriate steps can be taken.
- **Close personal relationships** - that is, relationships that are not intimate but could reasonably be viewed as going beyond the boundaries of professional conduct - **are strongly discouraged and** must be disclosed in accordance with section 5 where there is a direct academic or direct professional responsibility.

3.3 When staff and students leave or graduate from the University this policy will no longer apply.

3.4 Personal relationships between members of staff are not covered by this policy but may give rise to actual or perceived conflicts of interest. In such cases, staff should refer to the University's [Conflicts of Interest Policy](#) and follow the relevant disclosure procedures contained therein.

3.5 These close and intimate personal relationships between staff and students could compromise, or be perceived to compromise, the relationship of trust and confidence which underpins the learning experience. The institution will take steps to manage any such relationships to safeguard student wellbeing and academic integrity.

4. Admissions and Recruitment

- (i) If an intimate or close personal relationship is pre-existing between any member of staff who has a role in selection for admission of students to the University and a prospective student, that member of staff must inform the Head of Department (or equivalent) at the outset of the admissions process so that steps can be taken to avoid any conflict of interest. The matter will, as far as possible, be handled in a way that respects confidentiality to ensure there is no detriment to the student applicant.
- (ii) If a new member of staff joins the University and has a pre-existing intimate or close personal relationship with a current student, they must inform the University promptly in line with this Policy. This allows the University to assess and manage any actual or perceived conflict of interest. The University will handle declarations sensitively and confidentially and will take appropriate steps to avoid any detriment to the student or staff member.

5. Maintaining boundaries and professional judgment

- (i) Staff must be mindful of maintaining clear professional boundaries in all relationships with students avoid situations that could lead to actual or perceived conflicts of interest. Staff should act in a way which safeguards student welfare and ensures standards of academic integrity are upheld.
- (ii) Even where a staff member does not have and is not likely to have responsibility for a student, staff should be very aware of and consider the potential for an actual or perceived imbalance of power or authority, accusations of bias or exploitation, and questions about the nature of consent, before embarking on an intimate or close personal relationship with a student. The risks of such are likely to be heightened where there is a significant age difference between the staff member and the student; the student is an undergraduate; and/or the student is more vulnerable for any reason.

6. Roles and responsibilities

- **Board:** the University Board and those to whom powers are delegated shall at all times act within the requirements of the Office for Students (OfS) Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England.
- **Vice Chancellor** is designated by the University Board to be the Accountable Officer for the University and, as such, is personally responsible to the University Board for ensuring compliance with the OfS Regulatory Framework and for providing OfS with assurances to that effect.
- **University Executive Team** are responsible for setting and role modelling expected standards of professional conduct and integrity across the institution.
- **Deans and Directors** are responsible for ensuring that members of staff within their areas are made aware of this Policy; ensuring that up-to-date records of declarations and conflicts of interests are maintained; and for determining and recording how to manage each, with the support from the HR.
- **The HR Business Partners and Employee Relations Team** are responsible for providing guidance and support to staff and managers on the interpretation and application of the policy.
- **All members of university staff** (as defined in section 2) are required to comply with this Policy and take personal responsibility for maintaining professional boundaries.

7. Disclosure and Declaration Requirements

7.1 If at the Policy commencement date, a relevant staff member:

- (i) has any ongoing intimate personal relationship that existed before the date this condition comes into force and that remains in existence **or** existed before the date that the staff member became a relevant staff member in relation to that student.

(ii) or has previously been in an intimate or any close personal relationship with any student:

7.2 The staff member should declare that relationship to the Chief of People, even if the relevant responsibility for the student has ended.

7.3 If a member of staff needs to make a disclosure, they should use the [Disclosure of Interests Form](#). For all Board Members (internal and external) please email all disclosures to boardclerk@bournemouth.ac.uk

7.4 Declarations will be handled confidentially and in accordance with data protection. Failure to disclose may result in disciplinary action being pursued in line with the conflict-of-interest policy.

7.5 Concerns raised under this procedure should be treated in confidence as far as that is reasonably possible and consistent with upholding the welfare and safety of students.

7.6 As far as possible communications regarding changes to practical arrangements necessitated by this policy should be neutral, limited to essential facts, and avoid publicising the situation that gave rise to them.

8. Relationships between staff and students

8.1 It is the responsibility of the member of staff to declare their relationship to the University at the earliest opportunity (following procedures outlined in this policy) so that an assessment can be made of any potential conflict of interest and influence.

8.2 Staff must be mindful of professional boundaries in all relationships with students and must act in a way which safeguards student welfare and ensures standards of academic integrity are upheld. Even when there is no formal responsibility for a student, staff should be mindful of the actual or perceived imbalance of power inherent in staff-student dynamics.

8.3 It is not possible to anticipate every scenario that may constitute, or be perceived to constitute, a breach of professional boundaries. Nonetheless, **any relationship that involves, or could reasonably be perceived to involve, any of the following characteristics will be regarded as crossing such boundaries and must be disclosed:**

- (i) **any form of dependency** - whether emotional, practical, financial, or otherwise - particularly where the student appears to be dependent on the member of staff; or
- (ii) **any indication of favouritism**, including circumstances in which a student is treated in an exclusive or preferential manner.

Potential Exceptions:

8.4 While the University's policy prohibits staff from entering into intimate personal relationships with students for whom they have any academic, pastoral, or professional responsibility, we recognise that there may be rare circumstances where exceptions are appropriate. **In all cases, full disclosure is required** so appropriate steps can be taken.

- **Pre-existing Relationships:** Relationships that began before one party became a staff member or student, or prior to the implementation of this Policy, may be exempt, provided it is disclosed.
- **No Professional Connection or Responsibility:** Where the staff member has no professional, academic, supervisory, or pastoral responsibility for the student, the relationship may be permitted, although still discouraged. This includes no involvement in teaching, assessment, supervision, or support for the student.
- **Marriage or Civil Partnership:** Relationships that are formalised through marriage or civil partnership may be exempt, though disclosure is still required.
- **Sabbatical Officers/Student Union Roles:** Sabbatical officers employed by the students' union may be exempt, though disclosure is still required.
- **Students Employed by the University:** We recognise that some students may also be employed by BU in various roles (for example, as student ambassadors). In cases where a student employee is in a consensual relationship with another student, this policy does not automatically prohibit such relationships. However, if the

student employee holds a position of responsibility or authority over the other student (e.g. involvement in assessment, supervision or welfare) this must be disclosed.

- **8.5 Staff who are also Students:**

- Where staff become enrolled as students during their employment at the University they will be defined for the purposes of this policy as a member of staff.
- Staff are prohibited from entering into intimate or close personal relationships with any student for whom they have academic, pastoral, or professional responsibility. This includes cases where a staff member is also a student.
- Relevant staff members are strongly discouraged from having any close personal relationship with any student.
- Staff members must declare if such a relationship has developed, is developing or appears likely to develop between them and any student.
- Personal relationships between members of staff are not covered by this policy but may give rise to actual or perceived conflicts of interest. In such cases, staff should refer to the University's [Conflicts of Interest Policy](#) and follow the relevant disclosure procedures.

9. PHD students

9.1 The University recognises that the specific experiences of postgraduate researchers (PGRs) may be insufficiently addressed in existing policies and discussions surrounding harassment and sexual misconduct. PGRs may be particularly vulnerable to such behaviour due to structural power imbalances—especially in supervisory relationships—as well as a lack of clarity around professional boundaries in academic contexts such as conferences and fieldwork.

9.2 Furthermore, academic isolation can limit access to peer support and make it more challenging to report concerns. The institution also acknowledges that raising concerns about harassment or misconduct can carry perceived or actual risks to the academic and professional progression of PGRs.

9.3 As such, to ensure that PGRs are adequately protected, supported, and empowered to report incidents without fear of reprisal, a list of 'safe contacts' will be published on the support and resource webpages to ensure PGRs know which staff have received enhanced training in how to respond to their specific experiences.

10. Investigations into Reports and/or Complaints or Allegations

10.1 Investigations

Where a relationship is declared:

- i A risk assessment will be undertaken in line with the conflict of interest policy and steps will be taken to remove or manage the staff member's professional responsibilities for the student.
- ii Safeguards may include reallocation of supervision, provision of support, assessment duties, or changes in timetabling.
- iii Both staff and students involved in disclosed relationships will be offered appropriate support. Staff will receive this through HR and Students through the University Safeguarding team

10.2 Non-Disclosure Agreement

A Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) is a legal contract that defines what information is considered confidential and establishes terms under which parties are obligated to protect it.

From 1 September 2024 Universities have been prohibited from using non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) where they relate to allegations about harassment or sexual misconduct. Bournemouth University will never ask any student or staff member to sign a NDA and are committed to remove any barriers that prevent students from disclosing information about their experiences.

10.3 Malicious and Vexatious complaints

A malicious complaint is one that is made with the intention to cause harm or damage, such as defaming a person or damaging their reputation, often with no basis or fact.

A vexatious complaint is either one that is made with the sole or main intention to harass, annoy or subdue somebody, or one that is unreasonable, without foundation, frivolous, repetitive, deliberately burdensome or unwarranted.

If it is found that a person has made a complaint that is malicious or vexatious, the University may instigate a disciplinary process against them. Disciplinary action will not be taken, however, if the matter is mistaken or otherwise ill-founded but not malicious or vexatious.

10.4 Escalating concerns

If you, or another staff member or student at BU, is affected by sexual harassment or assault, or an inappropriate staff-student relationship you can report your concern anonymously via our online reporting form.

Your report will be sent confidentially to dedicated BU staff who are trained to listen and respond sensitively. You won't be asked to take further action unless you choose to.

Support is available whether or not you choose to make a formal report.

11. Breach of Policy and Disciplinary Action

11.1 Entering into an intimate or close personal relationship with a student is a breach of this policy and will be treated as a serious matter. Any such case will be investigated in accordance with the University's Disciplinary Policy.

11.2 Breaches of this policy, including failure to declare a relationship or any engagement in misconduct, may result in disciplinary action under the Staff Disciplinary Procedure.

11.3 In serious cases, including those involving abuse of power, harassment, or sexual misconduct, this may lead to dismissal or referral to external authorities.

11.4 If it is discovered that this Policy has been unintentionally breached - for instance, if a staff member was unaware that the other person involved was a student and had no reasonable grounds to suspect it- the staff member must notify HR as soon as they become aware of the situation. If a staff member is uncertain whether a relationship with a student needs to be disclosed under this Policy, they should err on the side of caution and disclose it.

11.5 While these relationships are strictly prohibited, students retain the right to report harassment or sexual misconduct, even if it occurs within the context of a relationship with a member of staff. In these circumstances, the student will not face disciplinary action for participating in the relationship and will be protected from any form of retaliation. The university has a duty to provide support and safeguarding for all students, and any disclosures will be handled with sensitivity and care.

12. Support and Safeguarding

12.1 In all personal and professional relationships with students all University staff must act in a way which safeguards student welfare. This includes being mindful of professional boundaries in order to uphold standards of academic integrity and avoid conflicts of interest.

12.2 Close personal relationships between students and staff can cause significant issues because of conflicts of interest, imbalances of power and authority, perceived favouritism and undermining of trust and confidence in the academic process. Such relationships can run into difficulties causing negative consequences for student welfare and the staff member can be at risk of formal complaints or concerns

12.3 All students will need to complete mandatory training as part of their induction period, which will include training on behaviours that may be considered harassment or sexual misconduct, as well as how to report concerns and what support is available. This includes wellbeing services, academic support, and external advisory bodies where needed.

12.4 Universities implement safeguards to protect students from exploitation or harm, such as ensuring separate reporting channels for student harassment and sexual misconduct. Safeguarding concerns arising from undisclosed or inappropriate relationships will be addressed in line within the University safeguarding procedures.

12.5 Staff will receive annual mandatory training on professional boundaries, safeguarding, and OfS E6 compliance.

12.6 Awareness campaigns will be conducted throughout the academic year to reinforce expectations of conduct, provide reminders on how to report concerns and where to find further information and guidance, including resources for support.

12.7 In order to ensure concerns raised are responded to in line with both regulatory and good professional practice, the university will identify staff in key roles who will receive enhanced training in how to respond to disclosures or concerns in respect of sexual harassment and misconduct.

12.8 Following this enhanced training, 'safe contact' staff will inspire more confidence for students and staff in disclosing and reporting harassment. It also demonstrates the Universities commitment to prevention through education, supporting a positive culture of learning and improvement.

13. Relationships with students under the age of 18 or vulnerable Adults

- Members of staff who have responsibility for any students must never enter into an intimate relationship with a student or any other person under eighteen years of age or with a student who is an adult at risk, irrespective of whether the member of staff has any responsibility for the student or other person.
- Staff are reminded that intimate relationships involving students (including applicants or offer-holders) under the age of eighteen where the staff member is in a position of trust or where the student is an adult at risk could fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.
- **Vulnerable Adult/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.
- Anyone suspecting a member of staff of acting inappropriately towards a student or any other person under the age of 18 or an adult at risk should refer to the Safeguarding Policy and contact the BU Safeguarding team via Safeguarding@bournemouth.ac.uk who may contact the local authority designated officer and/or the Police

14. Support for Students

14.1 If an intimate or close personal relationship has developed contrary to this Policy, even if it predates the Policy commencement date, and/or the student is not sure that the member of staff has disclosed it, they are encouraged to advise their Head of department, Personal Tutor or any other senior member of their faculty whom they feel able to approach. However, there will be no disciplinary consequences for the student if they do not do so.

14.2 Regardless of whether a relationship has been disclosed, students are encouraged to seek support from the Safeguarding team, their Head of department, Personal Tutor or any other senior member of their faculty whom they feel able to approach if they experience any inappropriate behaviour from a member of staff during that relationship. Help for any member of student who has been subjected to sexual misconduct, including sexual assault or rape, is available on the university [Single source of information](#) webpages

15. Support for Staff

We recognise that concerns about staff–student relationships can be upsetting and complex- whether you're personally affected, supporting someone else, or unsure how to raise a concern.

If you're a member of staff and need advice or support, there are confidential services available to help you navigate your options:

- Your Director/Head of Professional Service
- Your Executive Dean
- Your Line Manager, if appropriate
- the [HR department](#)
- [trade union representatives](#)
- by contacting the [Employee Assistance Programme](#)
- by contacting BU Faith and Reflection
- A member of Health, safety and wellbeing

Staff who experience inappropriate behaviour from and/or have a complaint against a student should contact their HR Business Partner or Employee Relations Manager who will agree appropriate steps.

16. Related Policies and references

- Safeguarding and Prevent Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Student Disciplinary policy
- Student Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy
- HR Disciplinary Procedures
- OfS Condition of Registration E6 Guidance
- Conflict of interest
- [BU whistleblowing \(Disclosure in the public interest\) policy](#)
- Student Agreement
- [Single source of information](#) – further information on support and resources, including the management of risk.

The policy will be reviewed annually, or in response to changes in regulatory requirements, reported incidents or findings following completed risk assessments.