

# Personal Relationships Policy



## 1. Scope and Purpose of the policy

- 1.1 This policy covers all staff of Bath Spa University (for the purposes of this policy, the definition of staff also includes volunteers, voluntary workers and agency staff). It is intended to provide guidance in areas where personal relationships overlap with working relationships and there may exist an imbalance of power (e.g. between a staff member and a student, or a senior staff member and a subordinate) to ensure that individual members of staff do not commit acts of impropriety, bias, abuse of authority, exploitation, actual or perceived coercion or conflict of interest and do not lay themselves open to allegations that they have done so.
- 1.2 The University recognises that there may be instances where existing family members may become students or staff members. The principles of this code remain the same whenever the relationship was formed and whatever the relationship type.
- 1.3 Bath Spa University values and relies upon the professional integrity of relationships between members of staff and in the staff/student relationship. In order that Bath Spa University business is conducted and perceived to be conducted in a professional and proper manner it is necessary to distinguish between, and take account of, personal relationships which overlap with professional ones.
- 1.4 In the context of this document, a personal relationship is defined as:
  - a family relationship
  - a business/commercial/financial relationship
  - relationships of a romantic, intimate, or sexual nature either multiple interactions or a one-off interaction

## 2. Relationships between staff and students

- 2.1 The University believes that the professional relationship between a student and a member of staff is vital to a student's educational development and affirms that the teaching relationship is based on trust, confidence and dependency. In this context a professional relationship is defined as one where there is an assessing, supervising, tutoring, teaching or pastoral role or a role providing administrative or technical support. Students are entitled to equality of treatment, and it is important that a personal relationship between a member of staff and a student does not, and is not perceived by others to, prejudice that equality of treatment.
- 2.2 In order to avoid conflicts of interest and to protect both parties, staff are strongly discouraged from entering into a relationship of a romantic, intimate,

or sexual nature with any Bath Spa University student during the student's programme of study.

- 2.3 Relationships of this kind are prohibited where staff have a responsibility to the student for assessing, supervising, tutoring, teaching, providing pastoral care or for whom they are required to provide administrative or technical support, or where staff are in positions of trust with the student where there is a clear power imbalance. Further, staff should not enter into a business, commercial or financial relationship with any Bath Spa University student, which could compromise, or could be perceived to compromise, the objectivity and professional standing of the teaching relationship. This applies equally to all BSU postgraduate students including postgraduate research students based at other HEIs who are co-supervised by BSU staff.
- 2.4 Bath Spa University recognises, however, that personal relationships may exist when a member of staff is appointed or when a student enrolls, or that relationships of a romantic, intimate, or sexual nature may develop between a member of staff and a student during a programme of study. It is the responsibility of the member of staff to report that they have a personal relationship with a student to his/her Head of Department/ School (or their line manager for those in more senior positions) and for this to be reviewed and recorded centrally with the HR department. Where a power imbalance exists, it will be necessary to ensure that conflicts of interest are managed, that neither party is subject to undue influence or favouritism, and that both parties are protected, and this may require alternative teaching, tutoring or assessment arrangements.
- 2.5 Disclosures made by staff and/or students will be kept secure and confidential and used solely for the purpose of managing any potential conflict of interest. Staff may seek guidance on the implementation of this Policy, on a confidential basis, from the Human Resources Department.

### 3. Relationships between members of staff

- 3.1 Although the existence of a personal relationship between members of staff does not necessarily constitute a bar to the employment or promotion of either party, staff should declare to their line manager any personal relationships, or incidents, which may give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest, trust or breach of confidentiality.
- 3.2 Where a personal relationship exists or develops between members of staff who are in a line management or supervisory relationship at work, they must not be involved in recruitment, selection, appraisal, promotion or in any other management activity or process involving the other party. Additionally, staff in a personal relationship should not work together in any circumstance whereby a conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage may be perceived to be gained from the overlap of a personal and professional

relationship. In any such circumstances, the relationship, or incident must be declared in confidence, to the Head of Department/ School (or Line Manager in the case of a Head of Department/School). The manager to whom the information is disclosed will then make alternative management arrangements (seeking advice from Human Resources, if required) and confirm them in writing to the individuals concerned. If it is considered unavoidable to inform other members of staff about the relationship in order to explain a change in management arrangements, this will be discussed with the individuals concerned, before it is disclosed.

#### 4. Declaration of personal relationships where they overlap with professional roles

- 4.1 Staff who are uncertain about whether they should take action regarding a personal relationship are invited to seek guidance in confidence from the Human Resources Department and/or their Trade Union representative.
- 4.2 In cases where any personal relationship as defined within this Policy is not declared and results in an unfair advantage or disadvantage (as set out in section 1) to either of the parties to the relationship (be they a member of staff or a student), will be considered a serious matter and may lead to disciplinary action.
- 4.3 While not a bar to employment with Bath Spa University, applicants for employment will be asked to declare any personal relationship with existing members of staff and/or students to the interview panel

#### 5. Potential criminal offence

- 5.1 Staff are reminded that certain criminal offences exist with regards to relationships and under 18's. It is illegal:
  - for anyone in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with anyone under 18 in the care of their organisation;
  - to show/distribute indecent images of anyone under 18;
  - to sexually exploit anyone including under 18's.

#### 6. Harassment and bullying at work

- 6.1 Bath Spa University will not tolerate harassment and bullying at work and its statement on Dignity at Work together with the Bath Spa University Anti-Harassment, Sexual Misconduct Procedure and Grievance Policies can be found on the Human Resources intranet pages or can be obtained in printed form from the Human Resources Department.

## Document Details

**Responsible Office:** Human Resources

**Responsible Officer:** Director of Human Resources

**Approving Authority:** Senior Leadership Group

**Date of latest approval:** November 2024

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**Related Policies and Procedures:** Anti-Harassment Policy, Grievance Policy, Disciplinary Policy, Sexual Violence and Misconduct Procedure, Safeguarding Policy, Safer Recruitment Policy

**Supersedes:** Personal Relationships Policy V1

**Next review due:** December 2029