



LSE Policy and Procedure on Personal Relationships

LSE Policy on Personal Relationships

Introduction

Positive professional relationships between staff, and between staff and students, which facilitate learning, research and the exchange of ideas, are recognised as integral to the success of the School. However, due to the power relationships that can exist between staff, and between staff and students, personal relationships which go beyond a professional working relationship can result in a conflict of interest, impacting on constructive and transparent working relations or resulting in adverse effects on the student experience. More seriously, these can result in abuse of power or the potential for, or perception of, abuse of power.

The School's Ethics Code, which applies to all staff and students, includes Integrity and Equality of Respect and Opportunity as two of the Code's six key principles. These detail the School's commitment to declaring interests and appropriately managing possible conflicts as well as treating all people with dignity and respect, being transparent and consistent with our decision making and ensuring that no person is treated less favourably as a result of any of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

All academic, research, teaching and professional services staff are in a position of trust. It is important that they demonstrate professional behaviour and act in accordance with the Ethics Code. Due attention should be given to individual actions and conduct to ensure that this is appropriate to the activities being undertaken.

The Policy on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct sets out our School's commitment to provide a safe environment free from sexual harassment and violence. This includes behaviour which extends beyond the physical premises and normal business hours of the School, such as conduct at events and trips abroad or on social media. Sexual harassment also occurs if an individual treats a person less favourably because that person has rejected or submitted to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature.

Policy Aims

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to set out the expectations and responsibilities of staff, students and the remainder of the LSE community specifically in respect of personal relationships

between staff, and between staff and students, but also in respect of any personal relationship that includes a power imbalance. This is in order to prevent abuses of power, protect staff and students from allegations of conflicts of interest and promote a safe and positive environment for all.

The policy sets out what constitutes a conflict of interest and the steps that must be taken where these exist to ensure that they are managed in an appropriate and timely manner to avoid any real or perceived conflicts of interest, or misuse of power and authority. It explains the steps that must be taken by members of the LSE community to ensure that any personal relationships within LSE, where permitted, are handled with integrity so that they do not impact on the working lives of staff or the student experience and / or give rise to unintended consequences. Where disclosures regarding personal relationships are made, these will be handled sensitively and confidentially.

Scope of Policy

This policy applies principally to all staff and students at LSE but can, under certain circumstances, also apply to other members of the LSE community (see section on 'Definitions').

It also applies to:

- job applicants in so far as they are requested to declare any personal relationships with existing staff in their application form;
- individuals applying to become students in so far as the staff member has influence over whether the student is admitted.

The policy and associated principles apply equally to all relationships within LSE regardless of sexual orientation and identity.

Definitions

Personal relationships: a relationship which transgresses professional boundaries and may lead to real or perceived conflicts of interest, or misuse of power and authority. Examples of personal relationships include:

- a family relationship
- a business/commercial/financial relationship
- a romantic/intimate/sexual relationship (including a brief or one-off occurrence)
- a close personal/social friendship, which exists outside of the workplace.

However, personal relationships are not restricted to these examples and anyone who is in a situation which could lead to a potential conflict of interest, as set out in this policy, must declare it as outlined below.

Staff member: any individual who is employed by LSE, or engaged to carry out work for LSE, including PhD students, visiting staff, guest and emeritus teachers, and hourly-paid staff. This may include students who are also employed on teaching or research contracts, when they are acting in those capacities.

Student: all undergraduate and postgraduate students, full-time and part-time students, including those enrolled in University of London, Summer School or executive programmes and those carrying out distance learning.

LSE community includes but is not limited to all students, salaried and non-salaried members of staff (including visiting staff), alumni, contractors and members of Council as well as other individuals who are authorised to be on School premises for the purposes of work or study.

A **conflict of interest** may arise where an individual might be seen to be influencing School matters for actual, potential or perceived personal benefit. Such a conflict may arise in a situation when a member of the School community is in a position to influence, directly or indirectly, School business, research or other decisions in ways that could lead to gain for them, their family or others. No one should be involved in making decisions in relation to their commitments to the School from which they, or anyone with whom they have a close financial or personal relationship, stands to personally benefit. Such considerations apply to a wide range of activities in which conflicts may arise, including, but not restricted to, student admissions, student assessment, disciplinary proceedings, appeals, staff recruitment, staff promotion and remuneration, procurement and assessing proposed relationships between the School and outside parties¹.

A **historical relationship** is one that has ended. Where these were in existence at the time of this policy, it is the School's expectation that they would have been reported. Once a relationship has ended, an individual can notify LSE by e-mailing their HR Partner. Information regarding the relationship will be kept on MyHR for two years in case of any concerns or complaints that the past relationship is impacting on current working relations and / or the student experience. Such complaints will be investigated in line with the policy in place at the time of the relationship.

Positional power: this is the authority held by virtue of one's position in the organisation's structure and hierarchy.

Consent: permission for something to happen or agreement to do something with a full understanding of the facts and without coercion. Consent is not consent if it is given under pressure, (perceived or real) threat, or given when someone is not really capable of giving it – e.g. if they are intoxicated, asleep and/or not capable of giving consent. Consent can be withdrawn at any time.

Exploited consent: consent that is secured only due to the occupancy of respective positions within an unequal relationship e.g. supervisor and student. Exploited consent includes experiencing pressure (perceived or real) to give consent in order to improve marks, improve promotion, or where a person believes they would not receive due professional attention.

Policy Principles

LSE staff must conduct themselves professionally and appropriately in their dealings with colleagues and students, in line with the School's Ethics Code² and the School's Safeguarding Policy³.

The same guidelines and rules for appropriate conduct apply when staff and students are participating in fieldwork, conferences and other work-related activities away from the normal workplace, including when staff are on sabbatical leave.

¹ <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/conIntPol.pdf>

² <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Ethics/EthicsCodeA5postcard.pdf>

³ <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/safPol.pdf>

Personal, financial, family, romantic or sexual relationships between students and staff, and between staff members (even if they are of similar age), where there is a significant difference in real or perceived power, present special problems because these relationships are vulnerable to exploitation.

The School's Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy and the Policy on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct set out actions or behaviour which constitute harassment based on protected characteristics including gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, age and race. Improper behaviour, where a member of staff uses their power to exploit students / staff, will be treated as gross misconduct and dealt with through the relevant disciplinary procedure.

Staff in positions of influence should ensure that their behaviour does not put students or staff in an uncomfortable or difficult position, for example, by suggesting one-to-one meetings offsite in informal settings, such as restaurants, pubs or homes. Professional activity should be carried out at all times either in appropriate spaces (offices, meeting rooms, cafés) on campus or using online communication tools. Due consideration should be given to the power imbalance that exists and care should be taken to ensure that contact and behaviour are professional, appropriate and non-intimidating.

LSE acknowledges that cases of exploited consent can occur in situations where consent is believed to have been freely given by both parties, but would not have been given if one party did not occupy a particular position of power. All personal relationships declared will be investigated and LSE will consider issues relating to any power imbalance that exists, such as the relative dependence and vulnerability of the student / staff member, and the esteem, respect and admiration which the student / staff member holds for the more senior staff member. The more these features are made apparent, the more the securing of consent to sexual or other intimacy may be seen as exploitative.

With the above in mind, the following three fundamental policy principles apply:

1. LSE prohibits any personal relationships between staff and students where i) there is a direct supervisory relationship in existence (e.g. PhD student and supervisor); ii) a member of staff has direct or indirect responsibility for, or involvement in, that student's academic studies (for example, assessor of a student's work) and / or personal welfare (for example, academic advisor and advisee) or iii) a member of staff interacts with a student as part of their role (including the period during which a prospective student is applying for admission, and any period of time after the completion of a degree during which the staff member maintains a direct or indirect professional role, such as mentoring or writing references for a former student).

Such relationships should be reported immediately in accordance with the procedure set out below so that appropriate safeguards are put in place, including changing the supervisory relationship or the relationship of direct responsibility for, or involvement in, the student's academic studies and / or personal welfare.

2. Where a personal relationship exists between a member of staff and student and where there is no professional relationship in existence, this must be reported in accordance with the procedure set out below to ensure transparency and so that any conflict of interest that arises from such a relationship can be resolved by putting new arrangements in place.
3. In order to mitigate possible conflicts of interest, LSE prohibits staff members who are in a personal relationship from being in a supervisory role (for example, principal investigator and research staff on the grant) or in any other role of influence over their professional career (for example, line manager and staff who are line managed by them). In such cases, personal relationships between staff must be declared so that new arrangements can be found that fully

resolve the conflict of interest.

LSE encourages the reporting of any concerns of wrongdoing and commits to ensuring that individuals are not adversely affected as a result of reporting such wrongdoing⁴. Students and staff can also report sexual (and other) harassment anonymously via the LSE online reporting tool⁵. The report should detail the concerning behaviour and staff member(s) and/or student(s) involved. Historical relationships that are brought to the School's attention by a member of the LSE Community, including alumni, which have resulted in a detrimental impact on a member of staff or student, will be taken seriously and investigated as far as reasonably possible.

Where there is an immediate or serious concern, other, more direct, reporting methods should be used, for example speaking to the Chief Operating Officer, who is the School's designated Lead Safeguarding Officer, or the Deputy Chief Operating Officer in their absence.

If any student or member of staff finds themselves in receipt of unwanted or inappropriate behaviour, is involved in a relationship that they do not consider to be truly consensual, or if they consider that they have been adversely affected by a misuse of power, authority, or conflict of interest, they should refer to the Policy on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct and the [guidance and support available](#) on how to report this. Any complaint made by a student and / or member of staff will be investigated in accordance with the relevant staff or student procedure (see Related Policies and Guidance Documents section below).

Staff or students involved in a personal relationship that is permitted within this policy should not be unfairly treated or suffer detriment. Where steps are being taken to deal with two individuals who are involved in a personal relationship, both parties will be treated fairly and consistently unless there are specific grounds to justify differing treatment, such as misconduct by one of the parties or power imbalance.

Legislation

The **Human Rights Act 1998 (Article 8)** provides for the right to a private and family life. This policy and procedure has been written to ensure that it balances an individual's right to a private life while ensuring respect for LSE values of integrity and trust.

The **Equality Act 2010** obliges employers not to treat a woman less favourably than a man (or vice versa) because of gender. It also gives workers the right not to be treated unfavourably because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

It is a criminal offence under the **Sexual Offences Act 2003** for a person in a position of trust to engage in sexual activity with a person under the age of 18, even where the person is of the legal age of consent.

⁴ <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/Services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/lsePubIntDisPro.pdf>

⁵ <https://info.lse.ac.uk/Making-a-choice/Report-an-incident>

LSE Procedure on Personal Relationships

Personal relationships between staff and students

An inclusive student experience is at the heart of LSE's educational offering to students and the varied roles that all academic staff play in educating, supporting, coaching and mentoring students is crucial to this being a positive experience. In accordance with the Ethics Code, it is essential that staff act with integrity in all dealings with students to ensure that they can flourish both whilst they are at LSE and in their future career.

As such, LSE believes that staff entering into a personal relationship with students is inconsistent with the important role they play and undermines the student's educational experience. This can ultimately cause the student damage or harm, as well as potentially leading to claims of misconduct, sexual harassment or discrimination against the member of staff.

The following sets out the measures that are in place to ensure that both students and staff are protected in this context.

Members of staff must not be in, or enter into, a close personal or intimate relationship with a student or staff member under the age of 18, or an adult known or suspected to be at risk. It is a criminal offence for staff who are responsible for students to enter into a sexual relationship with any student below the age of 18 where the adult is in a position of trust.

As stated in the LSE Policy on Personal Relationships: LSE prohibits any personal relationships between staff and students where i) there is a direct supervisory relationship in existence (e.g. PhD student and supervisor); ii) where a member of staff has direct or indirect responsibility for, or involvement in, that student's academic studies (for example, assessor of a student's work) and / or personal welfare (for example, academic advisor and advisee); or iii) a member of staff interacts with a student as part of their role (including the period during which a prospective student is applying for admission, and any period of time after the completion of a degree during which the staff member maintains a direct or indirect professional role, such as mentoring or writing references for a former student).

Where such a relationship exists, the policy prohibits, where that is the case, that a staff member remains in direct supervision (for example, PhD student and supervisor) or has direct or indirect responsibility for, or involvement in, that student's academic studies (for example, marker of a student's work) and / or personal welfare (for example, academic advisor and advisee). Instead, new arrangements need to be found that fully resolve the conflict of interest.

Regardless of the above, staff must declare **any** form of intimate or close personal relationship with any student so that any actual or potential conflicts of interest can be managed appropriately. This includes staff members who have a pre-existing relationship with someone who becomes a student.

A declaration must be made in accordance with the 'Declaring Personal Relationships' section below. Following a declaration, the line manager or Head of Department will consult with their HR Partner and an investigation will be conducted. Where a personal relationship involves the line manager or Head of Department, the investigation will be conducted by another appropriate manager in the School. If, as a result of the investigation, it is reasonably believed that misconduct has occurred, this will lead to a formal disciplinary investigation. Misconduct includes, but is not limited to, coercion, an abuse of power, grooming, favouritism, unwanted sexual advances or an intimate or sexual relationship.

Where a relationship is not found to constitute misconduct, the investigation will consider i) whether

there is a conflict of interest or potential for a perceived conflict of interest and ii) what actions can be put in place to mitigate the conflict.

Any undeclared relationships between staff and students, or other contraventions of this procedure, will be regarded as a disciplinary matter. Where the staff member has direct supervision, direct or indirect responsibility for, or involvement in, that student's academic studies and/or personal welfare, or the nature of the relationship constitutes an abuse of power, it will be regarded as a matter of gross misconduct and the member of staff will be suspended in line with the relevant disciplinary procedure. A full investigation will be undertaken in all cases and, if upheld, will result in disciplinary action against the staff member, up to and including termination of employment.

The above applies even when the student may, in parallel, hold an employment contract with the School.

In all cases, consideration will take into account factors such as the nature and type of relationship, the duration of the relationship and whether this existed prior to the person becoming a student, the extent of the power imbalance, any particular vulnerabilities that exist for the staff or student member, the nature of the contact between the two parties and / or the potential for the member of staff to influence the student's academic and career progression.

Reasonable attempts will be made to obtain relevant information, in order to investigate historical allegations of an abuse of power that involve existing staff as far as possible, including any patterns of behaviour that emerge during the course of an investigation. Where such allegations are upheld, disciplinary action may be taken in line with the relevant procedure.

Direct responsibility includes, but is not limited to, direct management, direct supervision, assessment of the student's work, welfare or pastoral roles.

Indirect responsibility includes, but is not limited to, recruitment and selection, teaching (formal and informal), student conduct issues, extenuating circumstances, the awarding, and processing, of bursaries and grants and the issuing of references. Indirect responsibility will also normally include a member of staff within the same department as a student where there is a significant power differential.

Personal relationships between staff members

As stated in the LSE Policy on Personal Relationships, LSE requires that personal relationships are declared in all cases where such a relationship results, or has the potential to result, in a conflict of interest. Where such a relationship develops or exists, the policy prohibits, where that is the case, that a staff member remains in a supervisory role (for example, principal investigator and research staff on the grant) or any other role of influence over their professional career (for example, line manager and staff who are line managed by them). Instead, new arrangements need to be found that fully resolve the conflict of interest.

Declaration must be made in accordance with the 'Declaring Personal Relationships' section below. Any undeclared relationships between staff which result, or have the ability to result in, a conflict of interest will be regarded as a disciplinary matter. A full investigation will be undertaken in all cases and, if upheld, will result in disciplinary action against the staff member, up to and including termination of employment.

Following declaration, the line manager or Head of Department will consult with their HR Partner and consider i) whether there is a conflict of interest or potential for a perceived conflict of interest and ii)

what actions can be put in place to mitigate the conflict. Where a personal relationship involves the line manager or Head of Department, the investigation will be conducted by another appropriate manager in the School.

In considering whether there may be a conflict of interest, factors will be taken into account such as the nature of the relationship, including whether it is a relationship in which one staff member has positional power over the other, the duration of the relationship and whether this existed prior to the working relationship, the extent of the power imbalance, the impact or potential impact on the individuals and others around them, the nature of the decisions that may need to be taken as a result of the working relationship, the potential influence that one party may have on the other's career progression and/or any particular vulnerabilities of either party. Examples include line management / supervision or being in the same line management chain, working together in a small team where the relationship dynamic has a greater impact, working together on key decision-making committees or groups.

The relevant manager will consult with their HR Partner to consider the appropriate steps to be taken. Where an individual is involved in decision-making that would impact the other staff member, they will be immediately withdrawn from decision-making (e.g. promotions, review / reward decisions, appointment to permanent positions). The manager / Head of Department may consider transferring one party or both parties, making alternative line management or supervisory arrangements, seeking redeployment in line with the School's Redeployment Policy and Procedure or implementing other appropriate arrangements to eliminate the conflict of interest, depending on the circumstances. In very rare circumstances, such alternative arrangements may not be feasible, and LSE may then have to consider dismissing one or both parties.

Any actions required to mitigate the conflict of interest will be taken in consultation with the member(s) of staff. The manager making the decision regarding the measures to be put in place will notify the relevant parties and record these in the relevant section of the declaration form (see below).

Where a personal relationship exists but either, there is no conflict of interest, or the conflict of interest has been resolved, the individuals must ensure that they demonstrate professional behaviour at all times and do not allow the personal relationship to influence their behaviour whilst at work. Similarly, if a personal relationship comes to an end, both parties must ensure that they continue to work professionally together and conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. Complaints made in this regard will be investigated in line with the appropriate procedure.

Declaring Personal Relationships

A member of staff who is involved in a personal relationship must notify their line manager or Head of Department / Service Leader / Centre Manager as soon as reasonably practicable and no later than a month from the start of the relationship. Where the manager is involved in the personal relationship, they should declare this directly to their HR Partner via the 'Declaration of a Personal Relationship' form on MyHR. Where relevant, personal relationships should also be declared in the annual Declaration of Interests survey (or via email to ethics@lse.ac.uk).

If the member of staff wishes to seek confidential advice before declaring a personal relationship, they can contact their HR Partner. This might include advice on whether the relationship is considered to fall under the remit of this procedure, the process that will be followed following a declaration, the possible options for managing a conflict of interest and the options should the other individual not wish to declare the relationship.

Once they have informed their manager or Head of Department/Service Leader/Centre Director, they should complete the 'Declaration of a Personal Relationship' form on MyHR, which will be provided to the relevant HR Partner. Declarations will be treated respectfully, sensitively and confidentially. These will be stored securely on MyHR and managed in accordance with data protection legislation.

Failure to disclose a relevant personal relationship within the stipulated timeframe will be considered a disciplinary matter and could amount to a breach of trust. The onus to declare rests with the more senior staff member, though either party may declare the relationship.

In staff/student relationships, whilst the responsibility for taking the above steps lies with the member of staff concerned, the student should report their relationship to another member of staff (e.g. Head of Department, if appropriate) or to the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy), and request that the above steps be taken. If another member of staff or student is aware of such a relationship taking place, then they are also expected to report the situation to their Head of Department or to the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy) or the Adviser to Women Students. The individual making the report should keep the details confidential, seeking advice as necessary and in line with this policy. Advice may be sought prior to doing so (see 'Advice' below). Reports will be treated confidentially and only discussed with relevant individuals in accordance with this procedure. Third parties making a report in good faith will not suffer detrimental treatment⁷ as a result of their declaration. If they believe that they have suffered any such treatment, they should inform the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy) or their HR Partner immediately. If the detrimental treatment is not remedied, the individual should raise it formally using the relevant staff grievance or student disciplinary procedure.

Students who wish to seek advice on, or are concerned about reporting, a personal relationship may confidentially contact the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy), the Adviser to Women Students or LSE Students' Union Advice Centre. Advice can be sought on many different aspects including, for example, harassment, the impact of a relationship on a student's studies and fear of bias or retribution.

Transfer of information

Subject to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), where an investigation into a staff member's conduct is instigated and the staff member leaves before it is concluded, the School will consider the process for informing other employers about such investigations if the staff member is known to have applied for roles elsewhere⁸.

Advice

Staff can seek advice from their HR Partner or a trade union representative on the interpretation and application of this guidance. Students can seek advice from their academic advisor, the Head of Department or the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy).

⁷ Detrimental treatment includes but is not limited to dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment

⁸ This is in line with practice in the Higher Education sector.

Related policies and guidance papers

- [The Ethics Code](#)
- [LSE Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [The Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy](#)
- [LSE Conflicts of Interest Policy](#)
- [LSE Speak Up \(Whistleblowing\) Policy](#)
- [Policy on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct](#)
- [Dignity and Respect at Work](#)
- [Disciplinary Policy and Procedure for Professional Services Staff](#)
- [Grievance Policy and Procedure for Professional Services Staff](#)
- [The Academic Annex](#)
- [Disciplinary Procedure for Students](#)

Review schedule

Review interval	Next review due by	Next review start
3 years	1 June 2027	1 January 2027

Version history

Version	Date	Approved by	Notes
1	May 2020	School Management Committee	Approved to take out for consultation
2	November 2020	JNICC	Approved
3	August 2021	School Management Committee	Approved
4	June 2024	JNICC	Approved
4.1	January 2025		Updated to reflect changes in terminology.

Links

Reference	Link
LSE Ethics Code	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/ethCod.pdf
LSE Safeguarding Policy	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/safPol.pdf
LSE Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/harPol.pdf
LSE Conflicts of Interest Policy	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/conIntPol.pdf
LSE Whistleblowing Policy	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/lsePubIntDisPro.pdf
LSE Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Policy	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/harVioPol.pdf
Dignity at Work Statement	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Human-Resources/Wellbeing-Pages-2020/Professional-wellbeing
Disciplinary and Dismissal Policy and Procedure for Professional Services Staff	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Human-Resources/Assets/Internal/staff/Policy/PSSDisAndDismissal.pdf
Grievance Procedure for Professional Services Staff	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/Services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/griPolProAcaSupStaff.pdf
The Academic Annex	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/acaAnn.pdf
Disciplinary Procedure for Students	https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/Services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/disProStu.pdf

Contacts

Position	Name	Email	Notes
Chief Operating Officer	Andrew Young	andrew.young@lse.ac.uk	Sponsor

Communications and Training

Will this document be publicised through Internal Communications?	Yes/ No
Will training needs arise from this policy	Yes/ No
If Yes, please give details The policy launch will have to ensure adequate communication so that staff and students understand the requirements placed upon them.	