

LSE Policy and Procedure on Personal Relationships: Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

Why has the LSE Policy and Procedure on Personal Relationships changed?

We recognise that positive professional relationships between staff, and between staff and students, are integral to the success of the School. Where these transgress professional boundaries, however, they can become problematic for both the individuals themselves and for others around them. As such, the changes to the policy and procedure are designed to preserve the integrity of professional working relationships and ensure that there is a robust declaration process for personal relationships that helps promote transparency and accountability.

What are the key changes to the policy and procedure?

The definition of a personal relationship has been expanded and now includes the following:

- *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.*

It also sets out clear principles in terms of the School's approach:

- *Any personal relationship between a member of staff and student must be **reported** so that any conflict of interest that arises from such a relationship can be resolved by putting new arrangements in place.*
- *The following personal relationships between staff and students are **prohibited** and appropriate safeguards will be put in place where any of these are reported:*
 - *where there is a direct supervisory relationship in existence*
 - *where a member of staff has direct or indirect responsibility for, or involvement in, a student's academic studies and/or personal welfare*
 - *where a member of staff interacts with a student as part of their role.*
- *Personal relationships between staff should be **declared** where these may result in a conflict of interest (e.g. where there is a supervisory role or any other role of influence over their professional career) and new arrangements made that fully resolve the conflict of interest. This policy does not ban social interactions between senior and junior colleagues; at the same time, this policy and the attached procedure applies to those situations where a level of social interaction and/or the extent of a personal relationship could give rise to conflict of interest concerns.*

How do I declare a personal relationship?

If you are a member of staff, you should declare personal relationships using [MyView](#) or by completing the Declaration of a Personal Relationship Form. If you are a student, you should report the relationship to another member of staff (e.g. Head of Department, if appropriate) or to the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy). For existing relationships, these should be declared within three months of the launch of the policy (1 September).

Who will see the information that I submit?

The details that you submit will be stored confidentially on your MyView record. The information will be shared with the relevant HR Partner who will liaise with your Head of Department or line manager to investigate whether there is a conflict of interest, or potential for a perceived conflict of interest and if so what actions can be put in place to mitigate the conflict.

General

I am in a personal relationship but I am not sure whether it constitutes a conflict of interest or might be perceived as such. How can I find out whether or not I should declare it?

The policy and procedure highlight certain relationships that will be considered to constitute a conflict of interest, e.g. line manager/direct report; PhD Supervisor/PhD student, Academic Adviser and advisee, undergraduate student/tutor.

However, there may be other professional relationships in which one of the individuals has, or may have, influence over another and/or is in a position to make/influence decisions regarding the other party – whether positively or negatively. This might not necessarily occur on an ongoing basis – it might be a one-off recruitment campaign or committee meeting to consider promotion requests – but, in all cases, it will be important that the relationship is declared so that there is sufficient awareness and matters can be handled transparently.

Also, consider how others around you who are aware of the personal relationship – team members, colleagues, other students – might interpret your actions towards that individual, as well as how you might feel if you were in their position.

If you are in any doubt, you should seek advice from your HR Partner or, if you are a student, from the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy). Advice will be provided on a confidential basis.

I am feeling pressurised to start a personal relationship with a senior member of staff – is there anyone I can talk to about this?

Nobody should be put under pressure to start a personal relationship and this should be raised immediately with the School. If you are a student, please speak with the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy) or Adviser to Women Students and if you are a member of staff, please speak to your manager or [HR Partner](#).

They will be able to provide you with information on the options that are available to you and where you can access support. The discussion will be kept confidential unless there is

considered to be a specific safeguarding issue. In such circumstances, a report will be made to the Chief Operating Officer, who is the School's designated Lead Safeguarding Officer.

For more general support, you can contact the School's [staff](#) or [student](#) counselling services. Please also refer to Appendix 2 of the School's [Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy](#), which provides a comprehensive list of contacts and sources of support – both internal and external.

What will happen if I formally report that I am being pressurised to start a personal relationship?

One of the options available to you is to make a report that can be formally investigated. If you wish to take the matter forward in this way, you will be asked to provide details in writing. A formal investigation will then be carried out by an independent member of staff. This will involve formal, separate interviews with you, the member of staff (and potentially others if necessary). If your complaint is upheld, this will result in disciplinary action against the member of staff and may result in dismissal.

I am in a personal relationship but declaring it will reveal my sexual orientation, which I don't want to do. Do I have to declare?

In order to protect our staff and students, all personal relationships that fit within the criteria of the policy must be declared. It is recognised that this may be more difficult for some individuals, but the procedure ensures confidentiality by making sure that any disclosures are only made known to a limited number of people who are required to know this information in their professional capacity.

In this situation, you are advised to discuss the sensitivity with the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy) – for students – or your HR Partner if you are a member of staff, before making a declaration, so that they are aware of your concerns.

You can also access support through the School's [staff](#) or [student](#) counselling services or [Spectrum](#): the School's LGBTQ+ network.

I have been in a consensual relationship for the past year, which is now prohibited under the new policy. What will happen when I declare the relationship?

It is recognised that members of staff may have ongoing relationships which have not previously required formal declaration. These will now need to be declared and, providing that they do not raise any safeguarding issues, practical arrangements will be made to address any potential, or actual, conflicts in a pragmatic way.

Following the launch of the policy, staff and students are expected to pay attention to the provisions and ensure that they act in accordance with the steps outlined.

I was in a personal relationship some time ago, but it has now ended. Do I need to declare this?

The policy requires that any personal relationship be declared that has been in existence within the past two years even if it has now ended. This is to ensure that there is transparency and to protect both parties from the possibility of related complaints or allegations.

If I declare a relationship that subsequently ends, what do I do?

For the purposes of transparency and the protection of both parties, relationships that have been in existence for the past two years should remain on record. However, you should update your manager/Head of Department so that they are aware and, once the two years has passed, you can update your record accordingly in MyView.

I was in a personal relationship with a member of staff that has now ended. During the latter stages of the relationship, it became abusive and, despite the relationship ending, I am still experiencing harassment and intimidation by the individual. I have not formerly declared the relationship and don't know if I should now do so?

All personal relationships that have been in existence during the past two years should be reported; however, in this situation, you may also wish to talk to a [Safe Contact](#) about your concerns. They will be able to provide support and help you decide whether to also make a report through the School's 'Report It, Stop It' [online form](#). If you decide to do so, a School representative will make contact with you in order to support you in understanding the options available to you. Alternatively, you can speak to your HR Partner if you are a member of staff or the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy) or Adviser to Women Students if you are a student.

In addition, you may want to consider contacting the School's [staff](#) or [student](#) counsellors, or accessing support externally. You can find further sources of support on the following [website](#) or in Appendix A of the School's [Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Policy](#).

I have already declared a personal relationship through the Annual Declaration of Interests exercise; do I still need to complete the form?

Relationships declared through this exercise will be passed to the relevant HR Partner; however, you should still [complete the form](#) to ensure that all relevant information is captured and available in deciding whether there is a conflict of interest that needs to be managed.

Staff-Student Relationships

I am a student, but I am also employed by the School as a GTA to carry out teaching. I am in a personal relationship with an LSE Fellow in the same department. Do we need to declare this?

All relationships between staff and students should be declared even where the student is also a member of staff. However, it is unlikely that this will be considered a conflict of interest and, therefore, that any steps will need to be taken in mitigation.

I have a close emotional bond with one of my PhD students and we regularly meet socially to discuss their studies and other non-related matters. Should I declare this and, if so, what will happen as a result of my declaration?

This is considered a personal relationship between a member of staff and student under the procedure and should, therefore, be declared. As there is a direct supervisory relationship, this constitutes a relationship that is prohibited. As such, appropriate actions will need to be considered in response, which may include ensuring that there is no longer a direct supervisory relationship in place.

All staff in positions of responsibility should ensure that in going forward, such relationships are kept entirely professional.

I am an undergraduate student who is involved in an ongoing consensual relationship with a professor in another department. Do I need to declare this?

All relationships between staff and students need to be declared. The responsibility for declaration lies with the staff member, but students are also expected to disclose.

Following the launch of the policy, such relationships must be declared. Whilst it is unlikely in this situation that the member of staff would have any influence – either direct or indirect – over you, this would be investigated and, if necessary, measures would be put in place for the protection of both parties.

I am a student involved in a personal relationship with my supervisor, but they do not plan to declare the relationship. What should I do?

The responsibility to declare a personal relationship lies with the member of staff; however, students are also expected to declare. If a personal relationship, as defined by the policy, is not declared, this will be treated as a disciplinary matter for both the member of staff and student; where there is a direct supervisory relationship, this will be treated as gross misconduct on the part of the member of staff. The relative power relationship will be a mitigating factor in determining what actions will be taken.

You are both, therefore, expected to declare the relationship so that steps can be put in place to mitigate the conflict of interest. Failure to do so will be treated seriously.

I am friends with a student who is in a personal relationship with an academic in the same department. They have recently been provided with an employment contract to carry out some teaching but this opportunity was not offered to anybody else. I believe that this is preferential treatment – what should I do?

You should report your concerns to the Head of Department, so that this can be looked into. The matter will be investigated and, if this is upheld, it will be treated as a disciplinary matter.

I believe that a student on my course is involved in a personal relationship with their academic mentor and I am not convinced that it is entirely consensual. I am worried about them, but concerned that I might suffer repercussions if I report it, as the academic is also my departmental tutor.

If you are concerned about another student's welfare, it is extremely important to report it. The report will be treated sensitively and only shared with those that need to know. You are advised to speak to the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy) or Adviser to Women Students to understand the process that will follow on from making a report and to seek any reassurance that you might need. There are strict protections in place for individuals raising such concerns and any complaints of detrimental treatment as a result of doing so would be treated seriously.

I am a student and am not comfortable meeting with my supervisor in an informal setting – what can I do?

As set out in the LSE Policy and Procedure on Personal Relationships, staff in positions of influence should ensure that their behaviour does not put others 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, meetings rooms, cafes) on campus or using online communication tools. You can raise your concerns with the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy).

I am a student and have been presented with a gift by my supervisor – should I accept it?

Gift giving, particularly where there is a direct supervisory relationship, is not considered appropriate and could constitute, or lead to the perception of, an abuse of power. In this situation, you should not accept the gift and are advised to speak to the Deputy Head of Student Services (Advice & Policy) so that any follow-up actions may be considered.

Staff

My partner and I work in the same department. This is generally known about – do we still need to declare the relationship?

There is no need to formally declare this relationship unless one of you has a direct supervisory relationship or influence over the other. You may choose to declare the relationship for the purposes of transparency and in case of any changes, but it is unlikely that any further steps will be required. If the situation changes, you should both formally declare at that stage.

I have worked at LSE a long time and have a lot of friends who I regularly meet socially. Do I need to declare all of these relationships?

The Personal Relationships Policy declares friendships as a close personal/social friendship, which exists outside of the workplace. This is intended to capture exceptional friendships that extend beyond a normal collegiate working relationship. Where a friendship goes over and above a normal professional working relationship, e.g. visiting each other's homes, going on holiday, these do not need to be declared unless you have direct supervisory relationship/influence over the other person. However, you do need to consider carefully whether there are any situations in which this could give rise to a conflict of interest or the perception of a conflict of interest, particularly if you are in a senior position in the same department. In particular, you must ensure that you are never in the position of making any decisions in connection with areas such as pay, promotion, reward etc.

I am currently part of a large team but have recently successfully applied for, and been offered, a position which means that I will have management responsibility for the team. I have a close friendship with one of the members of the team – am I allowed to accept the position?

In accepting the position, you must declare the relationship and measures will need to be put in place to ensure that you are not responsible for the line management arrangements. This might include alternative line management arrangements for that member of the team so that you are not responsible for any management decisions that affect them, such as performance reviews, pay increases etc.

I have been in a personal relationship with a colleague in my line management chain for a number of years but we have kept this completely confidential and nobody is aware. Do we have to declare this and, if so, how can we be reassured that it will be kept confidential?

Yes, you will need to declare the relationship if you are in the same management chain, as this is considered a conflict of interest under the policy regardless of whether others are aware. The relationship needs to be declared to ensure transparency and to protect both parties from potential complaints should this become known.

In declaring the relationship, only those who need to know will be informed. This includes your manager, Head of Unit and HR Partner. It will, otherwise, be kept strictly confidential.

Whilst changes will need to be made to the line management arrangements, the reasons for doing so will not need to be shared.

I am in a personal relationship with a peer who is the same grade as me. We work in the same division - do we need to declare the relationship?

You are not required to declare the relationship, unless one or other of you has any influence over the other. You may choose to declare the relationship for the purposes of transparency and in case of any changes but it is unlikely that any further steps will be required. Declaration of the relationship would be kept confidential.

I co-author a book with another academic colleague. As personal relationships now include a business/commercial/financial relationship, do I need to declare this?

It is not necessary to declare this. It is understood that through the natural course of their work, academics will collaborate on writing articles and books. The

business/commercial/financial relationship would apply in circumstances, such as setting up a private joint business venture.