



# LSE policy and procedure on personal relationships

## Introduction

LSE is a community of adults. Professional relationships between staff, and between staff and students, which facilitate learning, research and the exchange of ideas, are supported and encouraged.

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to ensure that expectations of staff are clear and that where close personal relationships exist or develop between a staff member and a student, or between staff members, the relationship will be managed in an appropriate manner to avoid any real or perceived conflicts of interest, or misuse of power and authority.

## Definitions

**Staff member:** any individual who is employed, or engaged, by the School to carry out work for the institution, including 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 summer school or executive programmes.

A **conflict of interest** arises where there is an actual or potential risk or a perceived conflict of commitments between acting in the best interests of the School and formal and/or informal commitments, obligations or undertakings to another body/association/affiliation in relation to the same or related matters, and those duties conflict. 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

parties<sup>1</sup>.

**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:**<sup>2</sup> consent that is secured only due to the occupancy of respective positions within an unequal relationship whose scope excludes such intimacy e.g. teacher and student.

## Policy statement

LSE staff must conduct themselves professionally and appropriately in their dealings with colleagues and students, in line with the School's Ethics Code<sup>3</sup> and the School's Safeguarding Policy<sup>4</sup>.

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.

Personal, 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.

Whether certain conduct is professional and appropriate is a question of subjective judgment, taking into account all the relevant circumstances.

LSE acknowledges 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. When required, LSE will consider issues relating to 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.

At the same time, LSE recognises that relationships between staff members, and relationships between staff and students, do indeed occur, that they need not all be damaging, and that the nature of any imbalance in positional power imposes particular responsibilities and duties on the (more senior) staff member.

LSE encourages the reporting of any genuine concerns of wrongdoing and commits to ensuring that individuals are not adversely affected as a result of reporting such wrongdoing<sup>5</sup>. Students and staff can report sexual (and other) harassment anonymously via the LSE online reporting tool<sup>6</sup>. The report

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

<sup>2</sup> David Archard 1994

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/ethics/14-0882-Ethics-Code-Branding-booklet-links-final.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/safPol.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/Services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/lsePubIntDisPro.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [lse.ac.uk/reportit](https://info.lse.ac.uk/reportit)

should detail the concerning behaviour and staff member(s) and/or student(s) involved.

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 Lead Safeguarding Officer.

## Procedure

### Personal relationships between staff and students

LSE discourages staff members from entering into any form of close personal relationship with any student. There is a particular conflict of interest where an employee has a personal relationship with a student for whom they have any sort of supervisory, pastoral care or assessment responsibility. In some cases, engaging in a personal relationship with a student may also be unprofessional and constitute misconduct, due to the inherent imbalances of power between these roles.

Where a staff member has a pre-existing personal relationship with a person who later becomes an LSE student, for example a staff member's child enrolls as a student, the pre-existing nature of the relationship would be taken into account in the determination of what conduct is professional and appropriate under this procedure.

LSE also recognises an individual may simultaneously be a student and a teacher (e.g. a PhD student with teaching responsibilities) and that seniority and/or power differences may be less marked. Where there remains a conflict of interest this policy still applies.

If such a relationship does occur, the member of staff in question should:

- inform their line manager or the Head of Department, and disclose the relationship in the annual Declaration of Interests survey (or via email to [ethics@lse.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@lse.ac.uk));
- withdraw from all small-group teaching involving that student, unless practically impossible;
- withdraw from the assessment of that student, even if anonymous marking is used;
- withdraw from writing references and recommendations for the student in question; and
- cease to undertake pastoral care duties, and refer the student to other sources of appropriate support.

Failure to disclose a relevant personal relationship within a reasonable timeframe may be considered a disciplinary matter and could amount to a breach of trust. Involvement in an inappropriate relationship with a student will result in disciplinary action against the staff member, up to and including termination of employment.

Whilst the responsibility for taking the above steps lies with the member of staff concerned, the student is equally entitled to report their relationship to another member of staff (e.g. Head of Department, if appropriate), and to request that the above steps be taken.

### Personal relationships between staff members

LSE discourages close personal relationships between staff members where there is a significant imbalance of positional power, and/or where there are actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

If such a relationship does occur, or if a staff member has a pre-existing relationship with someone who becomes a colleague, the members of staff in question should:

- inform their line manager or the Head of Department, and disclose the relationship in the annual Declaration of Interests survey (or via email to [ethics@lse.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@lse.ac.uk)); and
- withdraw from any decision-making (e.g. promotions, review/reward decisions, appointment to permanent positions) that would impact the other staff member.

These examples are not exhaustive and staff who have a personal relationship with another LSE employee are advised to consider carefully whether there is a potential for conflict of interest. Specific guidance can be sought from [ethics@lse.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@lse.ac.uk)

The line manager/head of department may consider transferring one party or both parties, making alternative line management or supervisory arrangements 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 the LSE may then have to consider dismissing one or both parties.

Failure to disclose a personal relationship within a reasonable timeframe may 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, as outlined above. Involvement in an inappropriate relationship with a colleague will result in disciplinary action against the staff member, up to and including termination of employment.

## Inappropriate behaviour by students

Inappropriate behaviour towards a staff member by a student is not acceptable. Such conduct by a student is likely to breach the School's Disciplinary Procedure, the consequences of which can include suspension or expulsion.

A staff member or student who needs assistance in responding to inappropriate behaviour that is initiated by a student should speak to their line manager, Head of Department, or a Safe Contact,<sup>7</sup> in the first instance.

## Transfer of information

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 elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

## Advice

Employees can seek advice from their Human Resources Partner on the interpretation and application of this guidance.

## Related policies and guidance papers

- LSE Ethics Code
- LSE Safeguarding Policy

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<sup>7</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/equity-diversity-and-inclusion/EDI-and-you/Where-do-you-stand/Sources-of-support>

<sup>8</sup> This is in line with emerging practice in the Higher Education sector.

- LSE Anti-Bullying and Anti-Harassment Policy<sup>9</sup>
- LSE Conflicts of Interest Policy<sup>10</sup>
- LSE Procedure for Considering Allegations of Harassment from Students Against Members of Staff<sup>11</sup>
- LSE Whistleblowing Policy<sup>12</sup>
- LSE Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Policy<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/harPol.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/conIntPol.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/proHarStu.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/Services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/lsePubIntDisPro.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> To be consulted on in early 2018

## Review schedule

Review interval	Next review due by	Next review start
3 year	December 2020	Sept 2020

## Version history

Version	Date	Approved by	Notes
1	19/12/2017	School Management Committee	

## Links

Reference	Link
LSE Ethics Code	<a href="https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/ethCod.pdf">https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/ethCod.pdf</a>
LSE Safeguarding Policy	<a href="https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/safPol.pdf">https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/safPol.pdf</a>
LSE Anti-Bullying and Anti-Harassment Policy	<a href="https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/harPol.pdf">https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/harPol.pdf</a>
LSE Conflicts of Interest Policy	<a href="https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/conIntPol.pdf">https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/conIntPol.pdf</a>
LSE Procedure for Considering Allegations of Harassment from Students Against Members of Staff	<a href="https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/proHarStu.pdf">https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/proHarStu.pdf</a>
LSE Whistleblowing Policy	<a href="https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/lsePubIntDisPro.pdf">https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/services/Policies-and-procedures/Assets/Documents/lsePubIntDisPro.pdf</a>
LSE Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Policy	Forthcoming

## Contacts

Position	Name	Email	Notes
Chief Operating Officer	Andrew Young	<a href="mailto:andrew.young@lse.ac.uk">andrew.young@lse.ac.uk</a>	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	