



LIVERPOOL
HOPE
UNIVERSITY

Est. 1844

Sexual or Romantic Relationships between Staff and Students

Document Control

Responsibility for Policy:	Director People Services Author HR Manager
Approved by and date:	Policy subject to final approval by University Council July 2023
Frequency of Review:	3 years
Next Review date:	2029
Related Policies:	Professional Boundaries Standards for the Staff and Student Relationships Policy
Minor Revisions:	
EIA:	Feb 2026 AL

Policy: Sexual or Romantic Relationships between Staff and Students

This policy should be considered in conjunction with the following policies where these are relevant:

Disciplinary Procedure
Grievance Procedure
Data Protection Policy
Declaration of Interest Policy
IT Acceptable Use Policy
Information Management Policy
Email Policy
Policy and Process for Handling Sexual Misconduct
Social Media Policy for Staff
Whistleblowing Policy
Dignity at Work and Study Policy

Introduction

Liverpool Hope University prohibits sexual, romantic or intimate personal relationships between Relevant Staff Members and students. And seeks to make such relationships culturally unacceptable. Such relationships are incompatible with the professional responsibilities owed by staff to students and may constitute serious or gross misconduct under the University's Disciplinary Policy.

Staff to student sexual relationships may be considered as serious misconduct under the University's Disciplinary Policy. Any sexual misconduct within the University will be taken very seriously. Any failure to declare a relationship which falls within the scope of this policy, or any breach of the prohibitions set out below, may be treated as serious or gross misconduct under the University's Disciplinary Policy.

1. Scope

- 1.1. This policy applies to employees of the University, agency workers and contractors, associates and others working for the University. It is designed to assure the safety and well-being of students in the course of study, work and social activities related to the University.
- 1.2. References in this policy to students, means any student of Liverpool Hope University, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, including students on courses at partner institutions, as well as summer and exchange students who are temporarily studying or working at Liverpool Hope University.
- 1.3. Staff are in an unequal power relationship with students (whether undergraduate or postgraduate irrespective of the student's age, maturity and level of study) and must recognise and maintain clear professional boundaries at all times. Staff must ensure that their relationships with students do not compromise, or are not perceived to compromise, their professional responsibilities. This is especially important where a staff member has particular responsibilities towards a student, for example, where an academic is responsible for delivering, setting, supervising or assessing a student's work, or where a non-academic member of staff has management or support responsibilities towards a student.
- 1.4. For the purposes of this policy Hope Works workers are considered primarily students rather than primarily staff. Hope Works students should not be working in a capacity that allows them to have direct responsibility for other students
- 1.5. For the purposes of this policy, a 'Relevant Staff Member' is any member of staff who has direct or indirect academic responsibilities, or other direct professional or pastoral responsibilities, in relation to a student. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Teaching staff, including lecturers and graduate teaching assistants
- Dissertation, project or research supervisors
- Personal tutors and pastoral or wellbeing support staff
- Senior members of staff with institutional or strategic oversight, including the Vice-Chancellor
- Security staff
- Staff involved in assessment, admissions, complaints, disciplinary, safeguarding or student support processes
- A member of staff with indirect academic responsibility could be a Head of School for the subject area of the student, for example, who does not have direct teaching responsibility for a student but who manages those who do.

2. Relationships between staff and students

- 2.1. The policy covers covers intimate, romantic or sexual relationships between a member of staff, students, interns or those on work experience, volunteers or any relationship (of whatever duration) that involves a degree of intimacy beyond that normally present in the staff/student relationship. These include relationships where there is physical intimacy, including isolated or repeated sexual activity, romantic or emotional intimacy, and/or financial dependency
- 2.2. Sexual, romantic or intimate personal relationships between a Relevant Staff Member and a student are prohibited. This prohibition applies where a member of staff has any direct or indirect academic, professional, pastoral, administrative or safeguarding responsibility for a student. This includes, but is not limited to, responsibility for teaching, supervision, assessment, selection, admission, research, welfare or wellbeing support, complaints handling, disciplinary processes, safeguarding, or determining access to resources or opportunities.
- 2.3. Any breach of this prohibition will be managed under the University's Disciplinary Policy and may result in dismissal.
- 2.4. The university strongly discourages sexual or romantic relationships between staff and students where the staff member is not a Relevant Staff Member. Where such a relationship occurs, it must be declared so that the University can assess any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest or power imbalance
- 2.5. Where a sexual or romantic relationships already exists between a member of staff and a student, the staff member must report this to their Senior Manager and the steps set out in the policy followed.
- 2.6. The only exception to the prohibition on Relevant Staff Members is where a personal relationship, (for example, marriage or civil partnership) pre-existed the staff member becoming a Relevant Staff Member in relation to the student. Such relationships must be declared immediately when the staff member acquires relevant responsibilities.

3. Abuse of Position and Professional Conduct

- 3.1. Those who work for the University must not abuse their position in any way and must not use coercion in any form. Coercion in any form is not acceptable.
- 3.2. This includes making any form of sexual advance or predatory behaviour towards students – this includes promising or alluding to rewards in return for sexual favours, or suggesting or threatening withdrawal of teaching or other forms of academic support. The existence of consent does not remove concerns relating to power imbalance, professional misconduct or abuse of authority.
- 3.3. In order to foster and maintain the highest standards of professionalism, intellectual integrity and social responsibility and to avoid potential or actual conflicts of interest, breaches of confidentiality or inappropriate conduct, all members of the University's community shall adhere to this policy.
- 3.4. Staff are reminded that it is a criminal offence (under section 16 of the Sexual Offenders Act 2003) to engage in a sexual relationship with any student under the age of 18 years. Such conduct if brought to the attention or discovered by the University, will be reported to the appropriate

authorities and treated as gross misconduct that, if proven, may result in dismissal.

- 3.5. Where a relationship may not be a criminal offence i.e. where students are aged 18+ and not an otherwise vulnerable adult, such a relationship may still constitute a breach of this policy and be considered unprofessional conduct that may lead to disciplinary action.
- 3.6. All colleagues are reminded that online activity should adhere to the digital conduct standards outlined in the Guidelines Professional Boundaries for Sexual or Romantic Relationships Policy.

4. Declaration, Reporting and Failure to Declare

- 4.1. Where a relationship exists or develops that falls outside the prohibition but within the scope of this policy, the staff member must declare this to their Senior Manager at the earliest opportunity **or at the latest within seven days**. If there is any doubt as to whether a relationship should be declared, advice should be sought from the line manager or Human Resources.
- 4.2. Where there is a staff/student relationship the line manager will report this to the Human Resources Manager and the Head of School. The register will be held by the Company Secretary.
- 4.3. Failure to declare a relevant relationship, particularly where a conflict of interest arises, confidentiality is breached, an advantage or disadvantage occurs, or the University is brought into disrepute, may result in disciplinary action.
- 4.4. If a member of staff becomes aware of a non-disclosed personal relationships between a student and a member of staff or a member of Governing Council and has concerns that this relationship might involve predatory behaviour, coercion or abuse or power, they should report this in accordance with the University's Whistleblowing Policy.

5. Assessments and Conflicts of Interest

- 5.1. Where a close personal relationship is declared, the manager will, having consulted the relevant senior manager lead, put in place appropriate arrangements to ensure that the member of staff has no involvement in assessment, examination, supervision, pastoral decision-making or any other activity giving rise to a conflict of interest.
- 5.2. Declarations of interest and any required withdrawal from assessment or decision-making processes must be formally recorded.

6. Review

- 6.1. If, following informing the manager and after suitable arrangements have been put in place, a member of staff involved in a close personal relationship feels they have been treated unfairly they should raise any issues via the University's Conflict Resolution and Grievance Procedure.
- 6.2. If, following informing the case worker at caseworker@hope.ac.uk and after suitable arrangements have been put in place, a student involved in a close personal relationship feels they have been treated unfairly they should follow the University Student Complaints Procedure.
- 6.3. Support via webpage and reporting tool for those experiencing sexual misconduct can be found <https://www.hope.ac.uk/gateway/students/studentdevelopmentandwell-being/sexualmisconductandharassment/> The policy can be found <https://www.hope.ac.uk/media/gateway/studentgateway/supportandwellbeing/studentadministrationdocuments/Process%20for%20Handling%20Sexual%20Misconduct.pdf>

7. Evaluation

- 7.1. The University is committed to continuous improvement in its service provision, and will continue to monitor the efficacy of this policy with quantitative and qualitative data at Senate or University Council.
- 7.2. The policy aims to assure the safety and wellbeing of students in the course of study, work and social activities related to the University.

- 7.3. The University will ensure through this policy that interactions between staff and students are appropriate and maintain professional standards and boundaries.
- 7.4. The University will ensure through this policy that staff and other workers understand their responsibilities for preserving the integrity of professional relationships with students.
- 7.5. Any breach of professional standards by staff in regard to this policy may be investigated under the University's Disciplinary Policy. (See Professional Boundaries Standards Policy for guidance on appropriate professional standards).
- 7.6. Communications should be professional at all time and in line with the University's Email and Internet Usage Policy and Staff Social Media Policy see [policies and strategies](#).

8. One-to-one discussions between staff and students.

- 8.1. Where a one-to-one discussion is required, including coaching or supervision, this must take place in an appropriate location on campus and not at other locations such as a bar, the student's accommodation or the staff member's home. Staff should pay careful attention to ensuring that other people are in the vicinity and that assistance could be called if required. Where a one-to-one discussion is required between a member of staff and a student it is advisable that this meeting should take place in a room with a glass-panelled door for increased visibility. The purpose of this guidance is to prevent and protect both the student and member of staff from any inappropriate behaviour.
- 8.2. Where a member of staff has concerns that a student is adopting behaviour which is not in line with appropriate student/staff relationships, they should raise this with their line manager or other nominated person within the School as appropriate.
- 8.3. All staff are bound by rules of confidentiality and must ensure they comply with this requirement.
- 8.4. All staff are reminded that their access to and use of any personal data for students must remain appropriate and in line with University policies. Accessing or using student personal data (such as phone numbers or home addresses or any other type of personal data) for non-professional purposes is strictly prohibited and may result in potential disciplinary action.
- 8.5. Records must be maintained in line with data protection legislation requirements.