



## STAFF AND STUDENT RELATIONSHIP POLICY AND PROCEDURE

<b>Policy owner:</b>	Director of Human Resources
<b>Implementation date:</b>	August 2025
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<b>Related policies and procedures:</b>	Conflicts of Interest Policy and Procedure Data Protection Policy Dignity at Work and Study Policy Equal Opportunities Statement Equality and Diversity Policy Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure Privacy Notice Safeguarding Policy

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### Version History

Version	Author	Revisions made	Date
V2.0	Human Resources	Overhaul of the policy	August 2023
V3.0	Human Resources	Overhaul of the policy	December 2024
V4.0	E6 Working Group	Review and addition of information relating to OfS Condition E6.	July 2025

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The University of Buckingham is committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity and professionalism in all staff and student interactions. In order for University business to be conducted in a professional and proper manner it is necessary to distinguish between, and to take account of, relationships which overlap with professional ones.
- 1.2 The Staff and Student Relationship Policy and Procedure is intended to set out guidelines for staff conduct within the workplace and provide a framework for managers to deal with personal relationships consistently and fairly where the University may be affected.
- 1.3 This policy exists to prevent the following:
- Actual/perceived conflicts of interest.
  - Perceived or actual abuses of power or authority.
  - Bias or the perception of preferential or prejudicial treatment.
  - Damage to the reputation of the University and integrity of its academic processes.
  - Subjective and unfair recruitment.
  - Preferential and inconsistent treatment of students and/or staff members.
  - Inappropriate behaviours.
  - Bullying and harassment.
  - Breaches of confidential information
- 1.4 In doing so it seeks to ensure a positive and supportive working environment where all are treated fairly.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all University of Buckingham staff, including academic, professional services, corporate services, visiting and contract staff.
- 2.2 This policy also applies to all students including those undertaking placements or exchange programmes with the university.
- 2.3 Graduate students who are employed by the University (e.g. PhD students who teach or assist with academic work) are considered staff for the purposes of this policy.
- 2.4 Students on a placement in an external organisation, including for example medical or education students, must adhere to any policies on personal relationships that exist within the external organisation. In the absence of a policy in the external organisation, students must continue to follow this policy.

- 2.5 The policy covers the following types of relationships:
- Intimate personal relationships between staff and students.
  - Pre-existing intimate personal relationships between staff and students
  - Other familial and close personal relationships between staff and students (including business, commercial, or financial relationships and close friendships/connections)
  - Relationships between staff members.
  - NB: relationships between students (whether intimate, familial or communal) are covered by the Student Code of Conduct.
- 2.6 The University recognises the complexities that may arise where some individuals are considered both students and staff members of the University. These individuals may include:
- Students who are employed by the University to undertake part-time work alongside their studies.
  - Apprentices who study and work within the University.
  - Staff members who undertake part-time study with the University alongside their role.

Where an individual's primary relationship with the University is that of a student (e.g.: student ambassadors, library auxiliaries, residential assistants) they may be treated as a student for the purposes of this policy.

Where an individual's primary relationship with the University is that of a member of staff (e.g.: employed apprentices, employed graduate students, employees undertaking university courses) they will be treated as staff for the purposes of this policy.

Where applicable, staff members who are also students should consult Human Resources and/or the Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer to determine how this policy may apply to them.

### **3. Legislative context**

- 3.1 This policy is guided by relevant legislation including:
- The Equality Act (2010)
  - The Protection from Harassment Act (1997)
  - The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)
  - The Data Protection Act (2018)
  - The Care Act (2014)
- 3.2 The following University policies and procedures were also taken into consideration:
- Conflicts of Interest Policy and Procedure
  - Data Protection Policy
  - Dignity at Work and Study Policy
  - Equal Opportunities Statement
  - Equality and Diversity Policy

- Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure
- Privacy Notice
- Safeguarding Policy

#### 4. Policy Statement

4.1. The University recognises that positive professional relationships and socialising between staff and students is a fundamental part of being an active member of the University community; however, the nature of staff/student and staff/staff relationships imposes particular responsibilities and duties on staff.

#### 4.2. Intimate personal relationships between staff and students

4.2.1. Subject to the caveats listed in Section 2.6 above, intimate personal relationships between staff and students are **strictly prohibited**, regardless of consent. This includes any physical, emotional or sexual relationship whilst one party holds student status and the other is employed by the University.

4.2.2. Staff must never use their position to initiate, pursue or accept an intimate personal relationship with a student.

4.2.3. The University **strictly prohibits** any intimate personal relationships between members of staff and any student who is under 18 or classified as a vulnerable adult under the Care Act (2014).

#### 4.3. Pre-existing intimate personal relationships between staff and students

4.3.1. Where an intimate personal relationship pre-exists a student's admission or staff appointment, the staff member must disclose it immediately and in writing to their Faculty Dean / Director of Service and the Director of Human Resources.

4.3.2. Appropriate safeguarding measures will be implemented by the relevant Faculty or Department, including complete removal from any professional role related to the student.

#### 4.4. Other familial and close personal relationships/connections between staff and students

4.4.1. This section refers to other familial relations (spouses are managed as an intimate personal relationship), close friendships/connections, and business, commercial or financial relationships.

4.4.2. Where familial or other close personal relationships exist between staff and students, the staff member must disclose it immediately and in writing to their Faculty Dean / Director of Service and the Director of Human Resources.

4.4.3. Appropriate measures will be implemented by the Faculty or Department to manage actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

4.5. Relationships between staff members including intimate personal, other familial and close personal relationships

- 4.5.1. The University recognises that employees may develop close, personal relationships with one other and that there may be cases where existing/previous intimate personal, other familial or close personal relationships pre-date one party's employment within the University.
- 4.5.2. These relationships will normally pose no conflict of interest; however, there may be instances where action is needed to ensure that these relationships do not impact or appear to impact University processes.
- 4.5.3. These instances include, but are not limited to, cases where individuals are involved with any process of recruitment, selection, appointment, promotions, line management, salary review, or appraisal.
- 4.5.4. Where an intimate personal, familial, or other close personal relationship exists between staff members, a direct hierarchical relationship between the parties should be avoided. Where such relationships exist:
- Line managers will not be eligible to be involved in the recruitment process with job candidates, nor with career progression applications within the same department.
  - Alternate line management will be sourced either where a personal relationship exists or occurs as a result of a promotion or reorganisation.
  - If such hierarchical relationships are unavoidable (for example, through one of the parties being appointed in a more senior role), subsequent opportunities to achieve a hierarchical separation should be pursued, or mitigating action taken.
- 4.5.5. Intimate personal, familial or other close personal relationships between staff members should be declared in writing to the appropriate Faculty Dean / Director of Service and Director of Human Resources.
- 4.6. If there is any doubt as to whether a relationship is relevant to the University's activities, it is recommended that everyone adopt the policy of 'if in doubt: disclose'. Advice and guidance may be sought from the relevant individuals as noted in Section 2.6 above.
- 4.7. Failure to disclose a relationship or abide by this policy may result in disciplinary action under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.
- 4.8. Staff are required to use the University communication channels, such as email and Microsoft Teams, when communicating with students or other staff about University matters. Careful consideration must be given before sharing personal email addresses

and/or mobile numbers, and staff members are encouraged to instead use work telephone numbers which may be diverted to personal mobile numbers as appropriate.

## 5. Responsibilities

- 5.1 Staff members are individually responsible for understanding and complying with this policy and procedure. Any breach must be reported immediately to the Director of Human Resources.
- 5.2 The onus is always on the staff member to declare a relationship which may lead to actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
- 5.3 Faculty Deans / Directors of Services are responsible for:
- Ensuring policy awareness and compliance within their areas.
  - Managing any disclosed pre-existing relationships.
  - Reassigning duties to prevent professional contact where applicable.
- 5.4 The Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer is responsible for ensuring alternative arrangements for examinations are in place where required. In practice, this may be delegated to the Head of Academic Services and/or the applicable Faculty Registrar.
- 5.5 It is the responsibility of all those involved to chronicle all relevant matters appropriately.
- 5.6 The Human Resources department will maintain a confidential record of disclosed relationships and oversee enforcement of this policy and procedure, including disciplinary processes where breaches occur.

## 6. Definitions

<i>Abuse of Power</i>	Exploitation of a staff role that pressures or influences another to act in ways they otherwise would not.
<i>Staff Member</i>	Any individual employed or contracted by the University or granted access to University resources as part of their role.
<i>Student</i>	Any individual enrolled on a course of study at the University, including those on placement, study abroad, or suspended status.
<i>Professional Relationship</i>	Relationships between individuals in the University setting which focuses primarily on university-related matters.

*Intimate Personal Relationship* Any relationship involving sexual activity, emotional intimacy, or romantic involvement.

*Vulnerable Adult* An individual over 18 who, due to illness, disability, or circumstance, is unable to protect themselves from harm or exploitation.

## **7. Procedural Guidelines**

- 7.1 Where a staff member is required to disclose a relationship, they should do so using the Staff and Student Relationship Form (Annex A). This must be completed and sent to their Faculty Dean / Director of Service and the Director of Human Resources as soon as reasonably practicable and always within one month.
- 7.2 A student can also declare personal relationships with staff members using the Staff and Student Relationship Form (Annex A).
- 7.3 The Faculty Dean / Director of Service will assess the risk of any conflict of interest arising and put appropriate protective measures in place if necessary. This should be done in accordance with the principles given in the Policy Statement. They will ensure that the student is aware of the disclosure where appropriate.
- 7.4 Staff who are unsure about what action to take should seek guidance from the individuals listed in Section 2.6 above.
- 7.5 Where a pre-existing relationship between a student and staff member is disclosed, the Faculty Dean / Director of Service should inform the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer. The Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer will confirm that the arrangements for examinations are made appropriately.
- 7.6 The Faculty Dean / Director of Service will ensure that both the affected parties are advised as to what alternative arrangements have been put in place.
- 7.7 A report must be made and sent to HR ([hr@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:hr@buckingham.ac.uk)) for recording. The frequency of staff/student relationships (and any corresponding complaints) will be monitored.
- 7.8 Any staff member who does not consider that satisfactory arrangements have been implemented may refer to the University Grievance Procedure.
- 7.9 Any incident of harassment or attempt to trade sexual favours by either party for altered marks, if proven, will be treated as gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal of the staff member, and/or expulsion of the student.

#### 7.10 Where:

- Staff members find themselves being approached by a student for preferential treatment in return for sexual favours, the staff member must resist and report any such approaches to the Faculty Dean / Director of Service and the Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer.
- Students find themselves being approached by a member of staff offering preferential treatment in return for sexual favours, the student should report any such approaches to their Faculty Dean who will then inform the Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer and the Director of Human Resources.
- Students and/or staff who have been involved in an intimate personal relationship with another member of the university community and who do not consider their involvement to have been truly consensual, have the right to complain under the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy and may also decide to report the relationship to the Police.

#### 7.11 In the circumstances where this policy is breached:

- unintentionally, for example where a staff member is unaware of the other parties relationship with the University and had no reasonable basis to suspect it, the staff member should inform their Faculty Dean / Director of Services as soon as they become aware of the situation.
- deliberately, an investigation will be undertaken as per the University's Disciplinary Policy and, if proven, may be treated as gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal of the staff member.

## **8. Record Keeping**

8.1 The University and all those involved in this process must comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and subsequent amendments. These include ensuring that personal data is kept accurate and up-to-date, held securely, not disclosed to unauthorised third parties, not kept for longer than necessary, and held only for the purpose it was collected for.

8.2 The Human Resources department will retain notes, reports and associated documents on file, and will retain them in accordance with the University's Archiving and Retention Policy.

## Annex A

### Notification Form for Declaration of a Personal Relationship

This form should be used to declare a personal relationship in accordance with the University of Buckingham's Staff and Student Relationship Policy. The notification form will be treated highly confidentially and stored securely on the HR file(s) of the staff member(s) named below and used for the purposes described in the Policy and Procedure.

<b>SECTION 1 – Your details</b>			
Title (Miss, Ms, Mrs, Mr, Dr, Professor etc)			
First name			
Family name			
Relationship with University (please tick as appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Student	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff and Student
Department/Faculty			
Name of Dean or Associate Dean or Head of Department			

<b>SECTION 2: details of other party</b>			
Title (Ms, Mr, Miss, Dr)			
First name			
Family name			
Relationship with University (please tick as appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Student	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff and Student
Department/Faculty			
Name of Dean or Associate Dean or Head of Department			
Is this person classed as a vulnerable adult?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	

### SECTION 3: details of relationship

Type of professional relationship (e.g. line manager, supervisor, personal tutor)	
Start date of professional relationship	
Type of personal relationship (please tick as appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional relationship/commercial/financial
	<input type="checkbox"/> Close personal/social friendship
	<input type="checkbox"/> Family relationship
	<input type="checkbox"/> Romantic/intimate/sexual relationship
Start date of personal relationship	

### SECTION 4: Declaration

I confirm that I have read the University's Staff and Student Relationship Policy and Procedure and the information I have submitted is in accordance with the criteria set out in the policy.

I understand that by submitting this declaration steps may be taken in relation to my professional relationship with the individual in Section Two in line with the University's Staff and Student Relationship Policy and Procedure on personal relationships, in order to mitigate potential conflicts of interest.

Signed:	
Date:	

**Staff members:** please submit this form to your Dean of Faculty and the Director of Human Resources. They will consult with the Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer and may also discuss further with you if necessary.

**Students:** please submit this form to your Dean of Faculty. They will consult with the Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer and may also discuss further with you if necessary.