

Staff Relationships Policy

2023-24

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Committee Approval

Committee	Committee Action	Date
SMT	Recommended Approval	7 June 2023
Board of Directors	Approved	25 September 2023
	Date in force	25 September 2023

The Staff Relationships Policy will be reviewed annually by our Senior Management Team (SMT). Any amendments will be subject to review by the Senior Management Team, who will recommend approval to the Board of Directors.

1. Purpose and Scope of Policy

Bloomsbury Institute is committed to maintaining a safe, supportive and inclusive environment to which our students and staff can feel they fully belong. Relationships are at the heart of everything that we do and, in particular, drive our teaching, research and knowledge exchange activities.

In addition, we are equally committed to the integrity of our actions, where decisions made are free of bias and conflict of interest. We recognise that some staff personal relationships can bring about an actual or perceived breach of those principles, which can have a negative impact on the Institute and the individuals concerned.

This policy applies to all Institute staff (including employees, workers and Non-Executive Directors). It could also apply to external consultants and contractors who undertake business or services with or for the Institute. Any reference to “staff” should be interpreted accordingly.

This policy sets out our position on personal relationships at work and gives guidance on:

- what is meant by ‘staff personal relationships’
- what action staff should take if they are in a personal relationship or are developing a personal relationship that falls within the scope of this policy
- how concerns about staff personal relationships can be raised
- the procedure that will be followed when a concern is raised
- the support and protection that staff or others are provided when raising a concern.

2. Applicability of staff personal relationships

This policy applies to all personal relationships including (but not limited to) current and former:

- close family relationships (including relationships by marriage)
- social or extra-curricular relationships (particularly where one party could be in a position to influence a work or study-related outcome for the other). This refers to relationships that involve close friendships and frequent engagement in activities unrelated to the workplace or study
- business or commercial relationships
- financial relationships (including where one party is indebted to or dependent upon the other)
- sexual, romantic, intimate and emotional relationships. The latter of these is defined as a relationship which is more than platonic with an emotional connection even if there is no physical or sexual interaction.

These relationships may arise between the member of staff and any individual including:

- students
- other members of staff
- contractors
- job applicants. If a member of staff has a close personal or familial relationship with a job applicant, it would normally be necessary for them to avoid any involvement in the

recruitment/selection process e.g. as a member of an interview panel or acting as a referee.

- other third parties who do business with, or have a commercial or educational interest in, the Institute's activities.

Through our policy, the Institute must ensure that a staff personal relationship does not give rise to a perceived or actual:

- conflict of interest
- breach of academic or professional integrity
- breach of trust of confidentiality
- undue influence over any matter concerning the Institute's business.

Such circumstances could be created in the following (non-exhaustive) ways:

- interactions with students including teaching, learning, supervision, assessment and marking
- recruitment, management and retention of staff including delegation of resources, staff development and career progression
- access to confidential information
- deployment of financial and other resources to staff, students and other third parties.

3. Staff and student relationships

As made clear in our [Safeguarding Policy](#)¹, intimate relationships between staff and students under the age of 18 are prohibited and may result in criminal prosecution. Staff personal relationships with students over 18 are strongly discouraged. These relationships are more likely than other staff personal relationships to attract concerns about abuse of power, conflict of interest, potential disruption of studies for the student and their peers and unprofessionalism due to the pastoral nature of the relationship.

Bloomsbury Institute believes that the professional boundaries associated with a relationship of trust and confidence that exists between a student and a member of staff is a central and essential part of the educational relationship. For that reason, and given the inherent imbalance of power between staff and students, the Institute discourages intimate relationships between its staff and students.

Those who work for the Institute must not abuse their position in any way, including by making any form of sexual advance towards students, pressurising students into intimate relationships, or through any form of sexual harassment, coercive/controlling or predatory behaviour. This includes promising or alluding to rewards in return for sexual favours or suggesting or threatening withdrawal of academic support if a sexual approach is not granted. Such behaviour, which involves a failure to recognise professional boundaries, constitutes serious or gross misconduct and will be subject to disciplinary proceedings, the consequence of which can include dismissal from the Institute.

4. Disclosure: staff personal relationships

A staff personal relationship must be disclosed to the relevant member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) or (in the case where the staff personal relationship relates to a member of the SMT) the Principal and Chief Executive Officer at the earliest opportunity. In exceptional circumstances where the report cannot reasonably be made to the individuals noted above and / or where the disclosure relates to the Principal and Chief Executive Officer or a Non-Executive Director, a disclosure can be

¹ <https://www.bil.ac.uk/qem/policies/>

made to a Non-Executive Director. Disclosures from consultants or contractors should be made either to the People, Talent and Culture Manager ² or to the most relevant member of the SMT.

A failure to disclose a staff personal relationship in good time, may result in consideration of disciplinary action. Please note that where a staff personal relationship has been disclosed in the past and no action has been required, the matter should be disclosed again where a change in circumstances means that the staff personal relationship could now be reasonably considered to create or could be perceived to create the concern(s) dealt with under this policy. The Institute will take reasonable steps to treat all disclosures raised in a confidential and sensitive manner, ensuring where possible that it does not impact upon any party's professional advancement or academic progress. If you are unsure about whether a relationship would be covered by the policy, you can seek advice from the People, Talent and Culture Manager in the first instance.

5. Staff personal relationships: raising a concern

Concerns about a staff personal relationship can be raised by members of staff, students and third parties under this policy, where it is reasonably believed that an actual or potential conflict of interest has arisen or could arise. Concerns should be raised with the relevant member of the SMT; (or where the concern relates to a member of the SMT), the Principal and Chief Executive Officer at the earliest opportunity. In exceptional circumstances where the concern cannot reasonably be made to the individuals noted above and / or where the concern relates to the Principal and Chief Executive Officer or a Non-Executive Director, a concern can be raised with a Non-Executive Director. Individuals are encouraged to provide as much information as possible when raising a concern, preferably in writing. Whilst proof of the legitimacy of the concern is not required, as a minimum the individual should provide:

- details of the nature of the concern
- reasons why the individual believes this concern to be valid, and
- the background / history to the concern to the extent known.

It is at the Institute's discretion whether it will disclose what action, if any, will be taken as a result of the concern(s) the individual has raised, bearing in mind the Institute's obligations in respect of confidentiality and to its [Data Protection Policy](#)³.

6. Procedure for dealing with a disclosure or concern about a staff personal relationship

On receipt of a disclosure (under Section 4) or a concern (under Section 5), the following procedure will normally apply and should usually be completed within four weeks of disclosure.

6.1 Review of information

The recipient(s) of the disclosure or concern shall assess the information, seeking support from the People, Talent and Culture Manager where required. Following a meeting with the staff member concerned and, where appropriate and/or necessary, the other individual involved in the relationship/alleged relationship, the recipient of the disclosure will determine whether a conflict of interest, breach of academic or professional integrity, breach of trust or confidentiality and/or undue influence over a matter concerning the Institute's business, has occurred or could occur.

² People, Talent and Culture Manager – contact email: antony.charles@bil.ac.uk

³ <https://www.bil.ac.uk/qem/policies/>

6.2 Outcome

The recipient of the disclosure or concern, following discussion with the member of staff and in consultation with the People, Talent and Culture Manager, shall determine the next appropriate steps. These are outlined below.

6.2.1 Considered but no action required

The staff personal relationship creates no conflict of interest, breach of academic or professional integrity, breach of trust or confidentiality and/or undue influence on Institute business. The matter, and its determination, will be recorded accordingly within the relevant staff HR file and register of disclosed staff relationships. Should circumstances arise in the future where the member of staff has cause to reasonably consider that the staff personal relationship could now create or could be perceived to create the concern(s) dealt with under this policy, a further disclosure should be made.

6.2.2 Action required to minimise risk

The staff personal relationship currently creates no conflict of interest, breach of academic or professional integrity, breach of trust or confidentiality and/or undue influence on Institute business however action should be taken to minimise that risk / perception of it. Action may include:

- removing the member of staff's responsibility in relation to the student's work, including marking and assessment or, where this is not possible, engaging an alternative marker / supervisor
- ensuring that the member of staff is not the sole decision-maker in respect of issues that impact upon that student
- reorganising the member of staff's duties to minimise contact with the other individual at work
- removing the member of staff's responsibility in relation to an individual's work, including recruitment, management and retention of staff, delegation of resources, accountability and development review and career progression
- ensuring that the member of staff is not the sole decision-maker in respect of issues that impact upon that individual; and/or
- in exceptional circumstances, seeking to move one staff member to a different reporting line / area of the Institute.

The following information will be recorded by the recipient of the disclosure and shared with the People, Talent and Culture Manager to place within the member of staff's confidential HR file and register of disclosed relationships:

- the fact that the member of staff is in a staff personal relationship falling within the scope of this policy (note: the detail of or other participant(s) in that relationship will be anonymised, in so far as that is practicable given the nature of the relationship);
- brief details of any action taken to minimise the risk/perceived risk identified (note: the detail of or other participant(s) in that relationship will be anonymised, in so far as that is practicable given the nature of the relationship); and
- where a relationship ends and it is considered that such an event will or could possibly give rise to any subsequent issues, details of mitigations put in place.

The recipient of the disclosure will ensure that relevant members of the Division / Department are aware of any action taken to minimise the risk / perceived risk identified, but will not disclose the nature of the personal relationship. Any member of staff who fails to comply with action required under this policy may be subject to disciplinary action.

6.2.3 Action required as a result of a breach of Institute policies

Where appropriate, a disclosure or concern raised under this policy may ultimately be considered under another Institute policy, e.g., where there are concerns that a staff personal relationship breaches the standards expected of the member of staff. Examples of standards breached are provided in Section 4 of the [Dignity and Respect Policy](#)⁴. In addition, a failure to disclose a staff personal relationship could result in referral to our Staff Disciplinary Procedure.

If that is the case, there may be further investigation / consideration of the matter. This policy is intended to supplement and not replace other Institute policies that may be utilised in these cases (including the Staff Disciplinary Procedure, Staff Grievance Policy⁵ and the Dignity and Respect Policy).

7. Recording data and retention

It is necessary and proportionate to record a relevant disclosure and to retain this information for a reasonable period of time, in this instance for, at a minimum, the duration of the relationship. A register of disclosed staff relationships will be kept and maintained by the People, Talent and Culture Manager.

When the relationship is no longer relevant or where it is determined that it ceases to exist, any local files held by the Division / Department will be destroyed and an appropriate record will be added to the HR file to evidence the relationship is no longer relevant or has ceased to exist. Relevant information relating to the disclosure will continue to be held on the employee's personal HR file which is normally retained for 6 years after employment ends.

8. False disclosure of staff personal relationship

Any proven instances of disclosures or concerns being raised with malicious intent or vexatiously will be viewed seriously and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the individual making the false disclosure.

9. Complaints in relation to this policy

If a member of staff is unhappy with the way the Institute has responded to a disclosure of a staff relationship, they may raise this with their Head of Division or Department and/or the People, Talent and Culture Manager in the first instance. A complaint from an individual who is not an employee of the Institute should be raised with the People, Talent and Culture Manager (or, if the complaint relates to the People, Talent and Culture Manager, to the Finance Director).

10. Related regulations, policies and procedures

- Data Protection Policy
- Dignity and Respect Policy
- Ethics Policy
- Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Staff Disciplinary Procedure
- Staff Grievance Procedure

⁴ <https://www.bil.ac.uk/qem/policies/>

⁵ Copies of the Staff Disciplinary Procedure and the Staff Grievance Procedure can be found on Breathe HR Online.

11. Review

The Staff Relationships Policy will be reviewed annually by our Senior Management Team (SMT). Any amendments will be subject to review by the Senior Management Team who will recommend approval to the Board of Directors.