**Guidelines for the professional conduct of staff**

**Introduction**

The University of Essex is committed to maintaining a professional working and learning environment, and recognises the importance that the integrity of professional relationships between staff and students and between members of staff play in this. These guidelines are designed to assist staff in the conduct of relationships that may exist, may have existed in the past or could develop whilst they are in employment at the University; they also apply to situations where, for any reason, a hostile or negative relationship has developed.

The aim of these guidelines is to protect individuals against accusations of bias, preferential or unfair treatment where such a relationship exists, has existed or may develop.

**Relationships between members of staff**

In the context of this document, a personal relationship is defined as a:

* family relationship;
* business or commercial relationship;
* financial relationship;
* sexual and /or romantic relationship;
* close friendship of a social nature, which extends beyond the workplace;
* membership of a group or organisation which could be perceived to operate for the advancement of its members interests to the detriment of others.

Where a personal relationship exists, has existed or develops between members of staff where one party has a management or supervisory responsibility over the other, the existence, or former existence, of the close personal relationship (but not necessarily its nature) should be disclosed to the Head of Department, Head of Section, Pro-Vice-Chancellor or other relevant manager. In the case of a Head of Department the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor should be notified. It is the responsibility of the more senior member of staff in the relationship to disclose this information.

Staff who have, or have had, a personal relationship should not be involved in any recruitment, selection, performance and development review, promotion or other processes, which could be perceived to give unfair advantage or disadvantage to the person with whom they have or have had such a relationship.

Where a relationship has not been declared and it is subsequently discovered that bias or unfair treatment had resulted from this in selection, performance and development review, promotion or other processes, the University may consider pursuing the matter through the disciplinary procedures.

**Recruitment of staff**

It is the responsibility of staff involved in the recruitment process to declare to the Chair of the panel or committee and the link Recruitment Officer, at the earliest possible opportunity, any relationship they may have, or have had, with an applicant. This is to ensure that there is no conflict of interest or unfair advantage gained during the recruitment process.

**Relationships between staff and students**

The University believes that the professional relationship between a student and a member of staff is an important part of a student's educational development. It is vital that trust and confidence exist between staff and students to ensure that students derive maximum benefit from their studies. In this context a professional relationship is defined as one where there is:

* + tutoring;
  + teaching;
  + assessment;
  + supervisory and or pastoral care;
  + responsibility on the part of the member of staff.

Staff are strongly advised not to enter into a sexual and/or romantic relationship with a student for whom they have this responsibility. Staff are also discouraged from entering into any other relationship, business, commercial, financial or a close friendship of a social nature, with a student which could compromise, or could be perceived to compromise, the relationship of trust and confidence.

The University recognises, however, that such relationships may exist, either when a member of staff is appointed or when a student enrols, and that a relationship may develop between a member of staff and a student during their course of study. Where a member of staff involved in such a relationship has an assessment, supervising, tutoring, teaching and or pastoral role for that student, it is the responsibility of the member of staff to inform his or her Head of Department or Section immediately in order that alternative arrangements can be made. This is to protect both the staff member and student from accusations of unfair and preferential treatment.

**Relationships with young people aged 16-17**

It should be noted that whilst a child can consent to sexual activity once they reach the age of 16, under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 it is a criminal offence for a person over 18 (teacher, student mentor, academic staff, etc) to have a sexual relationship with a child under 18 where that person is in a position of trust, even if the relationship is consensual.

Staff who are uncertain about whether they should declare a personal relationship with a student are invited to seek guidance on a confidential basis from the link HR Manager. Failure to declare such a relationship may result in disciplinary action being taken.

**Gifts and Hospitality**

The occasional exchange of business gifts, meals or low level entertainment is a common practice and is meant to create goodwill and enhance relationships. However, if the receipt of business courtesies becomes excessive, it can create a sense of personal obligation on the part of the recipient. Such sense of obligation can interfere with the individual’s ability to be impartial in the transaction.

Any gift or hospitality received or given must not have any influence or intention to influence the party receiving the gift or hospitality. In no circumstances must any gift of money be made or received by an official of the University. Please refer to the University’s [Anti-Bribery policy](https://sp.essex.ac.uk/sections/finance/SiteAssets/SitePages/Fraud%20and%20Other%20Incidents%20FPN%27s/FPN%2028%20-%20Anti-Bribery%20Nov%202017.pdf) (.pdf) for more information on hospitality and gifts.

**Anti-Bribery policy**

It is the policy of the University that all staff and third parties conduct business in an honest way, and without the use of corrupt practices or acts of bribery to obtain an unfair advantage, both at home and overseas. Please see our [Anti-Bribery policy](https://sp.essex.ac.uk/sections/finance/SiteAssets/SitePages/Fraud%20and%20Other%20Incidents%20FPN%27s/FPN%2028%20-%20Anti-Bribery%20Nov%202017.pdf) (.pdf). The University is committed to the highest level of ethical standards and sound governance arrangements and sets high standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the stewardship of public and private funds for which it is responsible and in the management of its activities. This is not just a cultural commitment on the part of the organisation: it is a legal requirement. Bribery is a criminal offence in most countries and corrupt acts expose the University and its staff to the risk of prosecution, fines and imprisonment, as well as endangering the University’s reputation.

This policy is mandatory and the University attaches the utmost importance to this policy and will apply a ‘zero tolerance’ approach to acts of bribery and corruption by any of our employees or third-party representatives (including agency workers and sub-contractors). Any breach of this policy will be regarded as a serious matter which after investigation may lead to disciplinary action and dismissal from the University. University employees should report all perceived or potential breaches of this policy to the Registrar under the [University Whistleblowing policy](https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/about/governance/policy-whistleblowing.pdf) (.pdf).

February 2018