

# HUMAN RESOURCES

## STAFF AND STUDENT PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS POLICY



### Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

This policy will be applied in a non-discriminatory way, in line with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine's approach to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

### 1.0 Scope and purpose of the policy

- 1.1 This policy sets out the expectations and obligations of LSHTM employees and workers, honorary staff, emeritus staff and joint appointees (together "staff") with respect to close personal relationships both between staff, and between staff and students, regardless of sexual orientation and/or identity.
- 1.2 LSHTM academic, research and professional services staff, postgraduate teaching assistants, and student mentors are in a position of trust. It is important that they demonstrate exemplary behaviour. It is always important to consider the impact of one's behaviour, including on external perception, no matter how well intended. Staff should always give due consideration to what is an appropriate and safe environment and judge what is appropriate conduct in relation to the activities they undertake. This policy should be read and implemented in conjunction with LSHTM's [Dignity and Respect: Anti-Bullying & Harassment Policy](#).
- 1.3 LSHTM recognises that a degree of socialising and the forging of friendships between colleagues, and between staff and students, is often a positive aspect of being an active member of the LSHTM community; however, the nature of staff/student and staff/staff relationships imposes particular responsibilities and duties on staff, particularly where there is a power imbalance. This policy is intended to ensure that appropriate safeguards and processes are in place to prevent abuses of power, inappropriate behaviours and sexual misconduct.
- 1.4 This policy seeks to limit circumstances where a position of power may be abused, knowingly or unconsciously, intentionally or otherwise. In doing so it seeks to ensure and promote a positive, safe and supportive working environment where all are treated fairly, appropriately and respectfully.
- 1.5 This policy strictly prohibits intimate relationships, whether sexual or non-sexual, with staff or students who are under the age of 18 or who may be considered as 'vulnerable' (see Appendix A of the [Safeguarding and Security Screening Policy](#) for further information regarding those who may be considered to be vulnerable).
- 1.6 This policy strictly prohibits close personal or intimate relationships between staff and students where there is direct supervision (including line-management), control or influence over funding, assessment of performance, or any form of activity which presents an imbalance of power or a dimension of control, unless arrangements ending any such have been put in place before the commencement of the intimate relationship.
- 1.7 Where a close personal or intimate relationship exists between a staff member and student where there is no direct supervision, control or influence over funding, assessment of performance, or any form of activity which presents an imbalance of power or a dimension of control, there must be a clear and prompt declaration of the relationship, see **Section 9**.

- 1.8 Where a relationship exists between members of staff where there is no direct supervision, control or influence over funding, or assessment of performance, but the relationship may give rise to real or perceived conflict of interest, power or control, or breach of trust or confidentiality, there again must be a clear and prompt declaration of the relationship, see **Section 9**.
- 1.9 For the purposes of this policy, 'direct supervision' or 'direct responsibility' not only includes first degree reports or supervision, but also relationships where one individual has any kind of hierarchical supervision, through one or more layers of line-management.
- 1.10 This policy applies to close personal or intimate relationships which are formed after the implementation date of this policy. Any existing or previous relationships are referred to in **Section 8**.

## 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 There is potential for abuse or the perception of abuse in any intimate relationships between individuals in inherently unequal positions where one individual is expected to discharge their responsibility for the other, whether or not they are paid for their services (e.g. including honorary staff and emeriti). At LSHTM, such positions include, but are not limited to: a teacher or supervisor and their student; a manager and staff member they manage; mid-senior staff and junior staff (including senior academic and junior academic) in the same department; mentor and mentee; advisor and advisee; Principal Investigator and postdoctoral scholar or research assistant in their research group; or student support services staff members and students, as well as any analogous positions.
- 2.2 Due to the potential for conflict of interest, whether actual or perceived, exploitation, favouritism or bias, such relationships may undermine the integrity of the supervision or evaluation provided, or may have adverse effects on the working and learning environment for those directly involved, as well as for the broader team and departmental culture.
- 2.3 Relationships in which one party is in a position to evaluate the work or influence the career of the other may also provide grounds for complaint by third parties when that relationship gives undue access or advantage, restricts opportunities, or simply creates a perception of these problems.

## 3.0 Definitions

### 3.1 Abuse of power

Abuse of power is where someone uses their position of power or authority in an unacceptable manner. Abuse of power can take various forms and may include, but is not limited to, grooming, manipulation, coercion, putting pressure on others to engage in conduct they do not feel comfortable with.

### 3.2 Vulnerable adult

Adults aged 18 and over have the potential to be vulnerable, either temporarily or permanently, for a variety of reasons and in different situations. This can relate to physical, mental, or psychological wellbeing, or the potential to be drawn into sexual or criminal exploitation and activity. See Appendix A of the Safeguarding and Security Screening Policy for further information.

### 3.3 Close personal relationship

Close personal relationships within this policy are defined as:

- Employees who are married, dating, in a partnership or a co-habiting arrangement, or other similar relationship;
- Immediate family members, e.g. parents and child, sibling, grandparent / grandchild etc, whether of the individual or their partner as per the first point of this section 3.3.
- Other relationships, e.g. extended family such as aunts / uncles / cousins / nieces / nephews, and any other individuals with whom there is a close personal relationship, be that a close friendship or business associate / relationship whether of the individual or their partner as per the first point of this section 3.3.
- Where one of the individuals in the personal relationship is employed by LSHTM and the other is employed by an organisation with whom LSHTM has a partnership operation / collaboration and both individuals have a work relationship in that partnership.
- A relative or close family friend where there is financial dependence.

The above list aims to cover all relevant examples of close personal relationships but is not exhaustive, and covers relationships that are undisclosed to LSHTM.

#### 3.4 Consent (for example, to engaging in an intimate relationship)

Consent is agreeing by choice and having the freedom and capacity to make that choice. The person seeking consent should always take steps to ensure that consent is freely given and that it is informed, and recognises that it can be withdrawn at any time.

#### 3.5 Sexual misconduct

Sexual misconduct is a form of harassment and is unacceptable behaviour of a sexual nature. It can include sexual harassment; sexual violence; intimate partner violence; sexual assault; stalking, grooming; coercion and controlling behaviour or bullying with sexual elements; sexual invitations and demands; sexual comments; sexual non-verbal communication; creation of atmospheres of discomfort; and promised resources or advancement in exchange for sexual access. It does not necessarily have to occur in person and is characterised by an absence of consent.

Sexual harassment is unwanted and unwelcome words, conduct, or behaviour of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, embarrassing, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the recipient. It is a misuse of personal or institutional power and often based on a person's gender although it is rarely about sexual desire.

#### 3.6 Freedom to consent

A person is free to make a choice if nothing negative would happen to them if they said no. For example, a person is not free to choose if:

- they are being threatened with violence (by the perpetrator and/or by someone else);
- they are being threatened with humiliation;
- they believe that the continuation or assessment of their studies, or progression or advancement of their career, will be at risk if they refused;
- they are being blackmailed;

- there is a significant power imbalance and the party without power feels pressured to continue in the relationship against their will.

### 3.7 Capacity to consent

Capacity is about whether someone is physically and/or mentally able to make a choice and to understand the consequences of that choice. For example, a person does not have the capacity to give consent if they are asleep or unconscious. A person's capacity to consent may be inhibited by the influence of drugs or alcohol or the presence of a cognitive or learning difficulty, or mental health condition.

### 3.8 Grooming

Grooming can be defined as a gradual process that someone in a position of power uses to manipulate someone to do things they may not be comfortable with and to make them less likely to reject or report abusive behaviour. Grooming will initially start as befriending someone and making them feel special and may result in sexual abuse and/or exploitation.

### 3.9 Intimate relationship

An intimate relationship is a consensual romantic (but not necessarily sexual) or sexual relationship which goes beyond the bounds of a platonic or working relationship. An intimate relationship could be brief, and includes a one-off occurrence.

### 3.10 Position of trust

A legal term which describes any situation wherein a staff member works closely with children, young people, or adults at risk.

## **4.0 Relationships with students or staff under the age of 18 or who are considered to be vulnerable**

- 4.1 Members of staff must not be in, or enter into, an intimate relationship with any student or staff member under the age of 18, or any adult who may be considered as vulnerable.
- 4.2 Staff must not engage in sexual behaviour with someone with whom they are in a position of trust. Whilst a young person can consent to sexual activity once they reach the age of 16, the Sexual Offences Act (2003) makes it a criminal offence for a person to engage in sexual activity of any kind with a person under the age of 18, where the adult is in a position of trust.
- 4.3 Anyone suspecting a member of staff of acting inappropriately towards a student or staff member under the age of 18 or a vulnerable adult should contact their senior line-manager and a senior member of the HR department.

## **5.0 Relationships between staff and students**

- 5.1 LSHTM prohibits close personal and intimate relationships between staff and students where the staff member has a direct responsibility for, or involvement in, that student's academic studies and/or personal welfare. LSHTM strongly discourages any other form of close personal and intimate relationships between any staff and student. PhD students who are employed temporarily or permanently as staff (including as demonstrators) are considered as members of staff. Direct responsibility includes direct line-management, direct supervision, assessing students' work, welfare or pastoral roles.

- 5.2 Staff have an obligation to declare an intimate or close personal relationship with any other student for whom they do not have direct supervision (whether new or existing), to enable LSHTM to assess whether any potential or actual conflict of interest exists. Please refer to **section 9**.
- 5.3 Once declared, a conflict of interest management plan will be made. Please refer to **section 9**.
- 5.4 In order to maintain appropriate relationships with students, and to help reduce the risk of sexual misconduct, abuse of power or conflict of interest, staff should:
- maintain an appropriate physical and emotional distance from students and perform their LSHTM duties in the best interests of the School without favour towards any individual student over another student;
  - avoid creating special friendships with students;
  - use an LSHTM e-mail account, telephone, software and applications, and internet access for communications with students where possible, avoiding personal messaging (such as through Messenger, WhatsApp or Twitter) wherever possible. (It is recognised that there will be certain emergency situations where personal messaging through non-LSHTM services may be required, but communication should be directed back to official LSHTM communication services at the earliest practical and safe opportunity.);
  - set an example by writing and communicating with students in a professional and business style. Any e-mail sent to a student or a colleague about a student may be disclosed to the student within LSHTM procedures or legal proceedings;
  - give careful consideration before giving their personal mobile phone number to a student. Sometimes it may be unavoidable, for example when they are arranging and taking part in conferences or organising field trips. LSHTM communication channels such as LSHTM e-mail or Microsoft Teams could be used as an alternative, but may not always be practicable. Staff are encouraged to use their work telephone numbers which may be diverted to the staff member's personal mobile;
  - adhere to the same guidelines, where logistically possible, when participating in fieldwork with a student, attending conferences and any other LSHTM activities whilst away from the usual workplace.
- 5.5 Where staff have a primary role of providing supervision, teaching, or pastoral care to students (including personal tutors), they should:
- where possible and reasonable, ensure that meetings and work discussions occur on LSHTM or other LSHTM-approved premises. Where not possible, ensure the meeting occurs in a public venue, such as a library or a café;
  - refer students with support needs to a relevant [LSHTM support service](#) and limit your role in providing personal support to a student where this is not part of your employment duties;
  - refrain from contacting students outside of reasonable working hours unless expressly agreed between the parties.
  - not seek unduly personal/sensitive information from a student except as relevant to an LSHTM process (which could include providing appropriate pastoral care/support).

5.6 Examples of unacceptable behaviour from staff towards students (please note that the below is not an exhaustive list):

- physical touching, that could be construed as sexualised (e.g. touches of the shoulder or squeezes of the leg), or comments or questions of a sexual nature (whether verbally or electronically);
- paying undue special attention to a particular student in a way which could be seen as grooming;
- accepting gifts from a student, unless it is following final assessment completion and/or deemed to be a minor token of thanks in accordance with [LSHTM's guidance on accepting gifts](#).

## 6.0 Relationships between members of staff

6.1 Relationships between members of staff are not prohibited. However, in order to prevent potential abuse of power or perceived or real conflict of interest, staff must declare close personal or intimate relationships as soon as they exist in either of the following situations:

- where a relationship begins that may give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest, exploitation, favouritism or bias;
- where a relationship already exists and a new situation arises that may give rise to a real or perceived conflict of interest, exploitation, favouritism or bias. For example, two staff members in a relationship who previously worked in different departments who now work in the same department (please refer to **section 9** for the disclosure process.)

6.2 Where staff are in an intimate or close personal relationship, consideration will be given as how to prevent actual or perceived conflict of interest, breach of confidentiality or unfair advantage gained (or perceived to be gained) from the overlap of a personal and professional relationship. This will likely include finding alternative line-management arrangements.

6.3 Staff are reminded of possible power imbalances within intimate and close personal relationships. Relationships between employees in which one has direct or indirect authority over another are strongly discouraged. LSHTM reserves the right to change line-management arrangements where there are concerns regarding a close personal or intimate relationship between staff members. In such situations where it is not possible to change line-management arrangements, to transfer at least one of the employees to another department or team, or to find other reasonable adjustments enabling the conflict to disappear, LSHTM reserves the right to dismiss one or both employees (with notice in accordance with the employee's contract, or pay in lieu of notice). Dismissal would, however, be undertaken only as a last resort in circumstances where no other course of action was reasonably viable.

6.4 In order to maintain appropriate relationships with colleagues/peers, and help reduce the risk of abuse of power or conflict of interest, staff should:

- maintain an appropriate physical and emotional distance from other staff while working;
- perform their LSHTM duties in the best interests of the School without favour towards any individual staff member over another;
- avoid paying undue special attention to a particular member of staff in a way which could be seen as grooming;

- use their LSHTM email account, telephone (including Microsoft Teams), software and applications, and internet access for work-related communications with staff and maintain professional communications;
  - be aware that any e-mail or message sent to or about a colleague may be disclosed within LSHTM procedures or legal proceedings.
  - write and communicate with colleagues in a professional and business style;
  - establish boundaries between professional and non-professional communication with colleagues;
  - adhere to the same guidelines, where logistically possible, when participating in teaching, fieldwork, conferences and other LSHTM activities when away from the usual workplace;
  - where possible, ensure that meetings and discussions about LSHTM matters occur on LSHTM or other LSHTM-approved premises;
  - refer colleagues with support needs to a relevant LSHTM support service, such as [staff counselling services including the Employee Assistance Programme](#), and/or [Occupational Health](#), and be mindful to limit their role in providing personal support to a staff member where this is not part of their employment duties.
- 6.5 Where an intimate relationship ends it is expected that all parties will continue to conduct themselves in a professional manner in the workplace and avoid personal disputes which impact on the working environment or other colleagues and students. It may also be appropriate for some of the actions put in place by LSHTM during the relationship to continue for a period of time following the end of the relationship. The staff members involved will be consulted and required to comply with reasonable actions or instructions.
- 6.6 The principles of this policy apply to any staff member who begins a relationship with an external client, customer, contractor, collaborator, funder or supplier. If the staff member's job allows them authority over the client, customer, contractor, collaborator, funder or supplier (for example if the staff member has the authority to decide to whom to award contracts), the relationship must be declared to the staff member's line-manager. In these circumstances, LSHTM reserves the right to transfer, or as a last resort dismiss, the staff member following the relevant policies and procedures.

## **7.0 Inappropriate conduct by students and staff members**

- 7.1 Unprofessional or inappropriate conduct towards a student or staff member is not acceptable. A student or staff member should seek advice immediately if they feel that they or someone else have/s been subject to unprofessional or inappropriate conduct from a student, staff member or colleague, by speaking to their personal tutor or line-manager, Head of Department, Dean of Faculty, or their HR Partner to ensure appropriate support and advice/guidance is provided. LSHTM's [Dignity and Respect: Anti-Bullying & Harassment Policy](#) sets out the behavioural standards expected of all staff, and provides further information and guidance as to how concerns can be reported and how they will be dealt with. Staff and students can also report concerns anonymously via the [Report & Support tool](#).
- 7.2 An intimate relationship between a staff member and student with direct supervision is a breach of this policy and is not permitted. Any alleged or

confirmed breach of this policy will be investigated in line with relevant LSHTM disciplinary and conduct policies.

- 7.3 Failure to disclose a close personal or intimate relationship with a student where there is no direct supervision, or with a colleague where there is a real or perceived conflict of interest, breach of trust or confidentiality, will also be investigated in line with relevant LSHTM disciplinary and conduct policies.
- 7.4 For the avoidance of doubt, behaviour of a sexual nature is not permitted on LSHTM premises, or during the course of your employment activities, regardless of the circumstances, the individuals involved, or consent.

## 8.0 Existing or previous relationships

- 8.1 This section applies to relationships which are in existence at the date from which this policy is effective 1 December 2022 and to relationships which have occurred within the past two years of the policy being published.
- 8.2 Members of staff must, within 3 months of this policy being published, declare any existing and/or previous (within the past two years) close personal or intimate relationships with students, in confidence to their HR Partner.
- 8.3 Members of staff must, within 3 months of this policy being published, declare any existing and/or previous (within the past two years) close personal or intimate relationships with colleagues, to their HR Partner, where there has been line-management responsibility, or where there could be a potential or perceived conflict of interest.

## 9.0 Declaration of intimate or close relationships

- 9.1 All declarations are to be made as soon as reasonably practicable and always within one month.
- 9.2 As any such declaration that contains sensitive personal data will be stored securely and managed in compliance with data protection legislation. Such declarations will be treated respectfully, sensitively, and confidentially to the fullest possible extent considering measures that may need to be put in place, and the wishes of both parties respected as far as is possible. This includes same-sex relationships where the parties may not be “out” publicly.
- 9.3 Staff who are unsure whether a relationship they have with a student or staff member constitutes a ‘close personal’ or ‘intimate’ relationship, should seek prompt advice from their line-manager, Head of Department, or their HR Partner. Staff are particularly encouraged to seek advice if the other party expressly does not wish the relationship to be declared.
- 9.4 Students who are unsure whether a relationship they have with a staff member constitutes a ‘close personal’ or ‘intimate’ relationship should seek prompt advice from their personal tutor, the Programme Director for their MSc, Taught Programme Director or [Student Support and Wellbeing Team](#).
- 9.5 Staff and students must both complete a [Personal Relationship Declaration Form](#).
- 9.6 This form should be completed even if the relationship was previously declared on a job or course application form.
  - Step 1 - Staff should submit the form to their HR Partner, who may need to discuss the details with the staff member and/or with the line-manager and/or Head of Department. Research Degree students should submit

the form to their Head of Department who may need to discuss the details with the student or with the staff member's line-manager, and their HR Partner; MSc students should submit the form to the relevant Taught Programme Director who may need to discuss the details with the student or with the staff member's line-manager, and their HR Partner.

- Step 2 - The HR Partner and/or Head of Department will review the form and where appropriate and necessary, will consult the parties and the line-manager and/or Head of Department and/or Taught Programme Director as to what actions, if any, are required to remove or mitigate any potential conflict. The actions will be documented on the form and copies provided to the relevant parties. The HR Partner will store the form securely on the member(s) of staff's central HR file.
- Step 3 - Any unresolved matter may be referred to the relevant Executive Team member (or more senior depending on the circumstances).

9.7 In placing measures to manage any conflict of interest, or in considering whether any other actions are necessary, the Executive Team member may consider the following:

- any known vulnerability of the student or staff member;
- the student's or colleague's personal circumstances at the time;
- whether there is a supervision or teaching arrangement in place at the time;
- the circumstances of the student when the close personal relationship commenced or was initiated (for example, if a personal relationship existed prior to the staff/student relationship);
- the nature of the two individuals' contact in study, research or employment;
- the potential for the staff member to influence the academic progress and outcomes or career progression of the student or colleague;
- the extent of the power imbalance between the two individuals.

9.8 Possible measures which could be implemented to manage a conflict of interest include: a change in line-management arrangements; a change in PhD supervisor; consideration as to the appropriate arrangements for staff who are involved in promotion procedures.

9.9 Both the staff member and student or colleague will be notified of the conflict of interest management measures put in place, and may be asked to be involved in relevant discussions where appropriate.

## Accessibility

If you require any document in an alternative format, for example, in larger print, please contact Human Resources.

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