

# Personal Relationships Policy

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Policy control

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## PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS POLICY

### 1. Introduction

This policy sets out the Glasgow School of Art's (GSA) expectations and requirements regarding close personal relationships between members of the institution's community. It is designed to safeguard professional relationships and ensure that all in the community are confident that the relationships will be conducted with integrity. Additionally, it supports our commitment to create an environment within which the GSA is able to exercise its duty of care to all staff and students.

### 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the welfare of all staff and students. It aims to protect the integrity of all students and staff from allegations of actual or perceived conflicts of interest as well as avoid complaints of harassment and grievance or disciplinary action. This is particularly significant where there is an imbalance of power.

This policy is not about prohibiting personal relationships, but to provide guidance to manage actual or potential conflicts of interest and to establish appropriate standards.

### 3. Scope

**3.1** This policy applies to all members of the GSA community which includes all those engaged by GSA and all students at GSA.

**3.1.1** For the purposes of this policy, employees, casual workers, agency workers, contractors and any third party engaged to work at the GSA, including students on work placements and volunteers are included.

**3.1.2 Student** refers to any individual studying on any course of study at GSA, including:

- Students who have accepted an offer of a place at GSA who have arrived on campus to start their programme and have not yet completed the formal registration process;
- Student officials in elected positions;
- Students on short courses;
- Students studying for an award from GSA who spends any time off-campus (such as work placement, exchange, year abroad, or summer school);
- Students who are registered as visiting postgraduate researchers;
- An individual who is applying to study at GSA. (It would not be necessary for an applicant to disclose a relationship; staff should highlight any relationship to their line manager if requested to participate in the application/interview process.)

**3.2** This policy applies in the workplace and in any setting outside the workplace which involves individuals of the GSA community.

**3.3** This policy covers close personal relationships which can include:

- **Intimate relationships** - including all sexual or romantic contact, whether in person and/or online or via means of other electronic or written communication, one off or longer term.
- **Close relationships** – this includes personal relationships which extend beyond usual work, study or extracurricular/leisure activities through which individuals are well acquainted, and engage in activities together which are unrelated to work or study. It does not cover work related group activity such as Friday night socialising with colleagues.
- **Family relationships** – including partners, spouses, children and other relatives.

#### **4. Principles**

This policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- a. GSA has a duty of care to protect students and staff from inappropriate behaviour which may include violence, abuse of power and trust, controlling/coercive and predatory behaviour and sexual harassment.
- b. GSA believes that the professional relationship of trust and confidence that exists between a student and a member of staff is a central and essential part of a student's educational development and pastoral care.
- c. Staff are **required** to disclose any type of close personal relationship with a student or any type of personal relationship with another member of staff which could be perceived as presenting a conflict of interest within GSA.
- d. GSA believes members of the GSA community have an obligation to act with professionalism, integrity and respect towards one another in all relationships. This includes staff/ student social events which link to GSA business.
- e. Intimate relationships between staff and students under the age of 18 are **prohibited**.
- f. Where students are over the age of 18, intimate relationships between staff and students are **strongly discouraged** in cases where there is a professional connection or proximity between the member of staff and student; for example, where the member of staff teaches or supervises in the same School as the student.
- g. This policy does not prohibit from employing or educating relatives of staff or students, or those in personal relationships.
- h. Staff and students may work or study in the same department or School as long as they comply with the requirements outlined in this policy regarding reporting or supervisory relationships, and mitigations have been put in place regarding relevant employment, financial and academic decisions.

**4.1** GSA must ensure that a staff personal relationship does not:

- create a perceived or actual conflict of interest;
- breach academic or professional integrity;
- breach trust or confidentiality;
- cause undue influence over any matter concerning GSA business.

This could arise in the following (non-exhaustive) circumstances:

- Recruitment, management and retention of staff including delegation of resources, staff development and career progression;
- Interactions with students including teaching, learning, supervision, assessment and marking;
- Deployment of financial and other resources to staff, students and other third parties; and
- Access to confidential information.

**5. Procedure**

**5.1 Personal Relationships - Staff/Student**

- a) It is required that all personal relationships (intimate, close or family) must be disclosed in writing by the member of staff involved.
- b) Staff must advise the Head of Department/ School (or in the case of a Head of School or more senior, the Deputy Director or Director) and the HR Department.
- c) Students who are working at GSA in non-sensitive roles, where power imbalances do not exist, are not required to disclose relationships with other students. Such roles include (but are not limited to) roles such as student ambassadors, etc.
- d) Failure by a member of staff to declare a personal relationship with a student may result in disciplinary action being taken. However, if an intimate relationship has not been reported, it is important that should someone subsequently experience harassment and/or bullying that they do not feel impeded in reporting simply because a previous relationship has not been declared. Therefore, staff should not avoid reporting bullying or harassment for fear of disciplinary action being taken for non-disclosure of a close personal relationship.
- e) Students are encouraged to declare involvement in a relationship with a staff member to another member of staff in GSA as soon as possible whether this is at any point during the relationship or after a relationship has ended. Students may approach any member of staff with this information (for example, their Programme Leader or Head of School). The above reporting routes allow students and staff to report at the local level which they may prefer; however further advice on appropriate steps can be provided by the Student Support or HR Departments.
- f) Where disclosure of a close personal relationship is made, the Head of Department or Head of School (or the line manager), will ensure measures are put in place to prevent

actual or potential conflicts of interest while dealing with the matter in a manner that aims to protect the dignity and privacy of all parties. For example:

- The member of staff will have no unsupervised involvement in the student's assessment;
  - The member of staff will not take any direct individual responsibility for academic, administrative and/or pastoral or other support responsibilities for the student;
  - Where the relationship is between a supervisor and their student, the supervisor should be removed from the supervisory team wherever possible. Alternatively, supervisory responsibilities should be organised to ensure that the member of staff is not the lead supervisor. If appropriate, appointing an additional member of the supervisory team should be considered. Where expertise is not available within GSA, an external supervisor should be considered;
  - A point of contact will be identified for the member of staff and student respectively, for example, a member of the HR Department or the Head of Department respectively, and;
  - The individuals will be expected to comply with any reasonable decision or action in regards to this policy.
- g) If a member of GSA becomes aware of a close personal relationship between a member of staff and a student and is uncertain about what action to take, advice should be sought from their Head of School or the HR Department.
- h) The person to whom the relationship is disclosed will report it to the HR Department in a timely manner and details will be recorded, and appropriate action will be taken. This will be shared with the involved parties and the initial disclosure and response will be held securely on file compliant with data protection requirements.
- i) Intimate relationships between members of staff and students could also give rise to situations where there is coercive or predatory behaviour. If intimate relationships arise between a staff member and student, and any person has concerns about any predatory or coercive element to such a relationship, they are encouraged to report or disclose this to their Head of School or Department or other relevant senior manager, who is obliged to ensure that such reports are recorded. An investigation may be undertaken in accordance with the GSA's Disciplinary Procedure.

## **5.2 Personal Relationships - Staff/Staff**

- a) GSA will strive to ensure we exercise our duty of care to all staff in their relationships at work, to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure appropriate transparency of management processes.
- b) GSA only requires relationships to be declared between staff where there is a potential conflict of interest.
- c) A conflict of interest between staff, and in terms of this policy, would include:
- line manager/supervisory role;
  - recruiting a prospective staff member;

- working in the same team (this could be at any level in GSA including interdisciplinary teams);
  - working on joint projects/ partnerships between Schools, Research Centres etc.;
  - being involved in decision making in relation to the other person (i.e. Selection/ Promotion/ Funding application), or;
  - A role which includes the signing off of regular funding or expenses.
- d) Close personal relationships between members of staff who have a supervisory or line management connection presents a potential conflict of interest. Close personal relationships between members of staff where there is not a management connection, but where the nature of the roles undertaken results in close working relationships, may also present a conflict of interest and/or operational challenge.
- e) It is required that all personal relationships (intimate, close or family) which create a conflict of interest, must be disclosed in writing by staff involved.
- f) Staff must advise the Head of Department/ School (or in the case of a Head of School or more senior, the Deputy Director or Director) and HR Department.
- g) Failure to declare a personal relationship which creates a conflict of interest may result in disciplinary action. However, such disciplinary action would not be taken against a member of staff who also experienced harassment or bullying by someone with whom they had a previous or ongoing close personal relationship. Therefore, staff should not avoid reporting bullying or harassment for fear of disciplinary action being taken for non-disclosure of a close personal relationship.
- h) If a member of GSA becomes aware of a close personal relationship between staff and is uncertain about what action to take, advice should be sought from their Head of School or from the HR Department directly.
- i) Where disclosure of a close personal relationship is made, the line manager(s) will consider, in consultation with the staff concerned, ways in which any potential conflict of interest might be removed. This should be reviewed at appropriate intervals, and also at the point the relationship or reporting structure changes. The line manager(s) will also speak to the staff involved about other/ new colleagues who they may need to inform to guard against any perception of impropriety relating to the relationship.
- j) In responding to a declaration of a relationship between staff, care will be taken to avoid any potential impact on the career prospects of all of the individuals whom it may impact. All reports of relationships will be recorded along with any agreed actions.
- k) Intimate relationships between members of staff can also give rise to situations where there is coercive or predatory behaviour. If intimate relationships arise between colleagues, and any person has concerns about any predatory or coercive element to such a relationship, they are encouraged to report or disclose this to their Head of School or other relevant senior managers, who are obliged to ensure that such reports are recorded. An investigation may be undertaken in accordance with the GSA's Disciplinary Procedure.

## **7. Complaints in relation to this policy**

If a member of staff or student is unhappy with the way GSA has responded to a disclosure of a relationship – prohibited, or otherwise: -

- A student may raise a complaint about a staff member with the Head of School or via the GSA Complaints Handling Procedure.
- A staff member may raise the matter with a senior manager and/or HR Department or initiate the Staff Grievance Procedure.

## APPENDIX 1

### Frequently Asked Questions

**1. Is this policy designed to discourage or stop people having relationships with colleagues or students?**

No, GSA does not generally discourage consensual relationships with the following exceptions:

- i) relationships with students who you may be teaching or have responsibility for are **strongly discouraged**; and
- ii) relationships between staff and students under the age of 18 are **prohibited**.

This policy is in place to ensure GSA ensures its duty of care to staff and students by managing any perceived or existent conflicts of interest if a relationship does exist.

**2. I am a member of staff who has a personal relationship with a student/ staff member. Do I need to declare this?**

In principle, yes you do need to declare close friendships, intimate, and family relationships. However, in some roles this may be irrelevant, please see responses below.

**3. I am a student who has a personal relationship with a student. Do I need to declare this?**

No, but see question 4.

**4. I am a student, but also a member of staff. If I have a relationship with a fellow student, do I need to declare this?**

This depends on your employment role at GSA, and whether your employment role has a power dynamic. If you are employed in roles such as Student Ambassador, you do not need to declare your relationship. However, if you are in any other roles where there is a perceived imbalance of power you should declare any relationships.

**5. I am a member of staff and I have a relationship with another member of staff. Do I need to declare this?**

It depends on whether your relationship could be considered a conflict of interest. If you do not work together, then no. However, if you have any supervisory/ line management responsibility for each other, and/or you collaborate, are involved with promotion or recruitment decisions impacting each other, then you should declare.

**6. I am a student and have a family member who works at GSA. Do I need to declare this?**

If your family member is a relative, then this should be declared. The staff member should take the lead in the declaration process.

**7. How do I declare a relationship?**

All personal relationships (intimate, close or family) **must be disclosed in writing by the member of staff involved** to Head of School or Head of Department, or in the case of Head of School or more senior, send to the Deputy Director or Director of GSA and the HR Department.

In the case of a student declaring a personal relationship, this should be to the Programme Leader or Head of School.

**8. If I declare a personal relationship with a member of staff or student, what happens to this information?**

The information is held in line with the Privacy Notice for Human Resources.

**9. I am a staff member, and I have had a relationship with a student in the past. Do I need to declare this?**

No, you do not need to declare past relationships which have ended unless there may remain a perception of a conflict of interest.

**10. If the relationship I have already declared ends, or one of the parties leaves GSA, should I report this and will records of this be deleted?**

If the relationship status changes you should inform GSA and we will update the status. The information will be kept as outlined in the Privacy Notice for Human Resources and then will be deleted.

**11. If I declare a relationship with a fellow member of staff who is a colleague in my own work area, what will happen?**

This will depend on whether there is a perceived, or existent conflict of interest. If there is, your line manager (or theirs, if they are the most senior person) will manage this appropriately.

This could have a variety of impacts depending on the nature of your role and work. As a minimum the other person with whom you have a relationship should not be conducting your career review, promotion, line management (where possible), or have been involved directly in your recruitment.

**12. If I declare a relationship with a student over 18, who I am involved in supervising, what will happen?**

GSA will typically change the student's supervisor: this is to protect you and the student. It is not a judgement on your relationship. In some cases, this may present a particular challenge due to the nature of the subject being studied. If an alternative supervisor is not available, other steps will be taken to ensure the situation is transparently addressed and academic integrity maintained and the individuals appropriately protected.

**13. I would rather not say who I am in a relationship with but feel I should still declare it. Is that possible?**

No. We need to know who is involved so that we can manage the situation.

**14. If I think someone who is in a relationship has not declared, but should have under this policy, what should I do?**

Ideally you should discretely remind them that they need to declare the relationship as set out in the Personal Relationship Policy. If you are unsure or uncomfortable doing this, advice can be sought from the HR Department.

**15. I am concerned that someone is in an inappropriate relationship but is trying to keep it secret. What should I do?**

Ideally, if you feel able to, you should speak with them and remind them that they need to declare the relationship as set out in the Personal Relationship Policy. Otherwise you may seek advice from the HR Department.

**16. What will happen if I don't declare a relationship where there is a conflict of interest?**

If you don't declare a relationship yourself where there is a conflict of interest, this could result in disciplinary action.

**17. Given some relationships naturally start and end very quickly but amicably, at what point do I have to declare a relationship under this policy?**

In many cases, if a relationship does not continue, you do not have to report it under this policy. However, if you believe there could be a perceived conflict of interest of any sort it may be better to declare so that the situation is transparent and may be managed.

**18. What amounts to a close relationship with a student? For example, if my neighbour's child comes to study at the GSA but I have nothing to do with their studies, should I declare this?**

In these circumstances it would depend on a number of factors, how close you are to the student, and whether you would be involved in assessing their work. In the circumstances described, we would not expect this would need reporting.

**19. If someone else reports that I am in a relationship, will this be checked with me prior to anything being recorded?**

Yes, if someone reported a relationship you would be asked to verify this information. It should be noted that there may be consequences if you do not report a relationship yourself.

**20. Will my line manager or Head of Department/ School be made aware if I declare a relationship under this policy?**

Yes, the information on the relationship will be held by the line manager or Head of Department/ School. This information will be confidential, and will only be shared if there is a requirement to manage a conflict of interest and it is likely that you would be consulted on how best to achieve this.

**21. If I wish to declare but do not wish my Head of School or equivalent to know, is there an alternative route for making a declaration in confidence?**

No, if there is a conflict of interest this needs to be managed at a local level. In exceptional circumstances you should seek advice from the HR Department.

**22. I have been in a coercive/ abusive relationship which my abuser won't allow me to declare. If I ask for help to escape the situation, will I be disciplined for not reporting the relationship earlier?**

No – GSA will offer support to any employee or student who is experiencing abuse. You should not be deterred from coming forward for help because of this policy. To seek support please contact the HR Department.

**23. I am in a coercive/ abusive relationship and I am afraid of the consequences if I declare it. If I disclose this or ask for help to escape the situation, will you tell my abuser?**

In this situation your safety is the priority. GSA would work with you and offer support to deal with the situation in the best way for you. To seek support please contact the HR Department.