

SOAS Personal Relationships Policy			
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Related documents:	SOAS Dignity and Respect Policy Sex and Gender Based Violence Policy SOAS Safeguarding Policy Staff Grievance Policy Staff Disciplinary Policy Student Disciplinary Procedure Report and Support Webpage		
Documents replaced:	HR-067-02 Personal Relationships Policy		
<p><i>Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.</i></p>			

1. Overview

- 1.1. The SOAS 2026-2030 Strategy recognises the importance of community, prioritising it as one of our key strategic pillars. Underpinning that, we are committed to creating a community that reflects the ethos of our SOAS 2026 - 2030 EDIW Plan: we are *One SOAS: Diverse by nature, inclusive by design*; creating an inclusive culture relies on healthy and mutually respectful relationships between each member of our community.
- 1.2. Healthy, supportive and professional relationships between staff, and between staff and students are essential for fostering a positive and inclusive culture. Such relationships are encouraged to generate and facilitate collaboration and plurality of thought and discourse, debate and research, as well as supporting the individual development and progression of our staff and students.
- 1.3. The purpose of this policy is not to prevent healthy, professional relationships, but to acknowledge the hierarchical nature of academic life, the potential for unequal power dynamics within relationships and the potential for abuses of power within relationships, whether intentional or unintentional. We want to ensure transparency and trust across our community.
- 1.4. SOAS acknowledges that there may be instances of family relationships and consensual intimate relationships which occur within the community. This policy sets out processes for ensuring such relationships do not lead to any real or perceived situations which could be considered as preferential or unfair advantage or disadvantage.

- 1.5. Ultimately, every member of the SOAS community should feel safe while also being supported, and this policy aims to ensure that, while navigating the complexities of different personal relationships.
- 1.6. This policy works alongside the Dignity and Respect Policy and the Sex and Gender Based Violence Policy. This policy applies to all staff (temporary and permanent), contractors, students and third parties (including those with honorary titles, alumni and board members).

2. Definitions

2.1. Close Personal Relationship

- 2.1.1. A close personal relationship refers to a relationship between colleagues where, for example, the parties are relatives or close family friends, or a relationship where there is financial dependence.

2.2. Intimate Relationship

- 2.2.1. An intimate relationship refers to a consensual romantic or sexual relationship which goes beyond the bounds of a platonic or work relationship. This includes brief relationships as well as long-term ones.

2.3. Conflict of interest

- 2.3.1. A conflict of interest (COI) exists when an individual's personal interests, relationships, commitments, or external activities could improperly influence—or could be perceived to influence—their professional judgement, decisions, or actions on behalf of the University.

2.4. Breach of trust

- 2.4.1. A breach of trust is an implied duty that neither SOAS nor members of staff will act to break the duty of mutual trust and confidence that exists between them, without good reason. If a staff member breaches the duty, SOAS may take appropriate and proportionate action.

3. Types of relationships

3.1. Relationships involving direct responsibility

- 3.1.1. SOAS does not permit any personal or intimate relationships between staff (including contractors and temporary staff) or staff and students where one person in the relationship has any direct responsibility for another's:
 - Recruitment, appraisal or promotion
 - Line management, work allocation and/or assessment of work
 - Supervision, tutoring, teaching or pastoral care

- 3.1.2. Where an intimate or personal relationship exists or develops which creates a real or potential conflict of interest it must be disclosed to a relevant person within SOAS.
- 3.1.3. For staff relationships, this this would be the line manager of the most senior person within the relationship, Head of Department or Director.
- 3.1.4. For relationships between staff and students, this would be the Head of Department or Dean.
- 3.1.5. SOAS will work with those involved to provide alternative arrangements, for example, changing lines of management, or arranging for an alternative supervisor (further information is provided in the responsibilities section below).
- 3.1.6. Where a member of staff is uncomfortable disclosing their relationship for whatever reason – for example, they are concerned about the reaction, or they are in a known existing relationship with another party – they should discuss this with their HR Business Partner.
- 3.1.7. Where a relationship is not disclosed, this could become a breach of trust, depending on the circumstances, and SOAS may take appropriate and proportionate action.
- 3.2. [Intimate relationships with students of staff under the age of 18, or who are an adult at risk](#)
 - 3.2.1. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 makes it a criminal offence for a person to engage in sexual activity of any kind with another individual under the age of 18 or an adult at risk, where the person is in a position of trust.
 - 3.2.2. SOAS defines an adult at risk as a person over the age of 18 who may require services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness, and who is, or may be unable to take care of themselves, or protect themselves from significant harm, abuse or exploitation (please refer to the [SOAS Safeguarding Policy](#)).
 - 3.2.3. Staff members must not be in, or to enter into, an intimate relationship with a student or staff member who is under the age of 18, or who is known or suspected to be an adult at risk. This includes short-term visiting students, for example children taking part in Summer School activities at SOAS.
- 3.3. [Intimate relationships between staff and undergraduate students](#)
 - 3.3.1. SOAS recognises that there is the potential for a significant power imbalance between staff and undergraduate students as a cohort. While undergraduates are usually legal adults, they are likely to be young adults, and potentially more vulnerable as they begin university. For example, where they are living away from home, it is likely to be for the first time. International students may be living in a different country for the first time. Our undergraduate student cohort includes a significant proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and/or who are the first in their family to go to university. All students require a safe and supportive environment where they can trust SOAS staff implicitly.
 - 3.3.2. Consequently, SOAS as a rule, does not expect any staff member to enter into intimate relationships with undergraduate students.

3.3.3. We recognise that there may be legitimate exceptions to this position. For example, the existing partner or spouse of a staff member may choose to study at SOAS, or where a relationship develops between a staff member and a mature undergraduate student but these should be exceptions, rather than the norm. Any such relationship must be disclosed to a line manager, Head of Department or Director.

3.4. Relationships between staff and postgraduate students

3.4.1. SOAS strongly advises against intimate relationships between staff and postgraduate students.

3.4.2. However, we recognise that postgraduate students are generally a different cohort to undergraduates in terms of their age, life experience and level of vulnerability. Moreover, some postgraduate students are also SOAS staff members.

3.4.3. Aside from relationships involving direct responsibility or those where the parties are in the same department (see section 3.1), relationships between staff and postgraduate students do not need to be disclosed.

3.5. Personal or intimate relationships and conflicts of interest

3.5.1. Where a staff member has a personal or intimate relationship which creates a real or potential conflict of interest, it should be disclosed to their line manager.

3.5.2. For example, it could be a conflict of interest for someone to be involved in a procurement process involving a company where their family member is influential at that company (and this should be disclosed through the conflict of interest form within the SOAS procurement Policy).

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1. The University

4.1.1. SOAS has a responsibility to ensure that this policy is implemented transparently and appropriately.

4.1.2. SOAS will support anyone disclosing a relationship as far as possible to ensure those involved are not penalised for being transparent in their relationship. Line managers/ supervisors/ Head of Department will work with the individuals and HR Business Partners as appropriate. Actions might include:

4.1.2.1. allocating an alternative personal tutor or PI

4.1.2.2. changing reporting lines

4.1.2.3. redeploying or amending the duties of a staff member

4.1.2.4. restricting the data which the staff member has access to about the student or other staff member

- 4.1.3. disallowing the staff member to be part of any panel that facilitates promotional or academic opportunities for the other staff member or student. This would include assessments and assessment boards.
- 4.1.3.1. disallowing the staff member to provide references for the other staff member or the student.
- 4.1.4. Where there are breaches of trust and/or a relationship is perceived to be inappropriate, or to be too imbalanced in relation to power dynamics, SOAS will take appropriate and proportionate action, with the possibility of invoking the Staff Disciplinary Policy.
- 4.2. **Managers**
- 4.2.1. Line Managers/ supervisors/ Heads of Department are responsible for acting on any relationships which are disclosed to them. They should work with the individuals disclosing, HR Business Partners and any other relevant colleagues to ascertain the nature of the relationship, the nature of the individuals' interactions at SOAS and the extent of any power imbalance.
- 4.2.2. Relevant action should be taken, for example, similar to the list at 4.1.2. Once any future action has been agreed, a formal email notification should be sent to all relevant parties for information and transparency.
- 4.3. **Individuals**
- 4.3.1. Individuals are responsible for adhering to this policy and disclosing any relevant intimate or personal relationships to the appropriate manager.
- 4.3.2. Staff are responsible for maintaining safe, professional and transparent boundaries with students throughout all interactions. For example, ensure communication is through SOAS channels, arrange meetings on campus wherever possible, and maintain appropriate physical and emotional boundaries. Signpost students to appropriate support where relevant.
- 4.3.3. Where staff become aware of students contacting them with increasingly personal queries, or where students act inappropriately or push physical and emotional boundaries, staff should report this to their Head of Department as soon as possible, so that appropriate action can be taken.
- 4.3.4. Any individual who witnesses or experiences treatment from a staff member or student which they think is inappropriate and amounts to bullying, harassment, misconduct or sexual misconduct can report the incident at SOAS Report and Support and also refer to the Dignity and Respect Policy and Sex and Gender Based Violence Policy.