## Guidelines

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These guidelines on consentual relationships are taken from the University Calendar [http://www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/arch2004-5/sectionX/part10.html](http://www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/arch2004-5/sectionX/part10.html)

### 2.3 Guidelines on Consensual Relationships

The University of Southampton regards relationships between staff and students for whom they have some specific academic or other professional responsibility as an important professional issue. This is particularly so where relationships are romantic or sexual in nature. It is recognised that there can be no absolutes in defining whether a relationship is romantic; however it might conjure words such as emotional, close, deep, passionate, tender, affectionate or intimate. An overriding issue in determining if a relationship has crossed the professional boundary is whether the member of staff concerned would like other staff and students to know about the relationship. There are other types of relationships which are covered by these guidelines, including marital or established partnerships, parental or sibling.

For the purposes of these guidelines, the term 'staff' also encompasses postgraduate students who have supervision, teaching, or assessment responsibilities.

All such consensual relationships raise serious questions of conflict of interest and equal treatment in teaching and assessments, selection and research. They can also be damaging to trust, confidence and dependency as well as potentially having a harmful effect on working relationships with other students and colleagues. There can be no objection in principle or, if matters are properly handled, in practice to personal relationships between staff and students, but the list below details some services and functions where particular care is required.

For the protection of both staff and students, the boundaries of the professional role of staff must be fully recognised and respected. Staff should recognise their professional and ethical responsibility to protect the interests of students, to respect the trust involved in the staff–student relationship, and to accept the constraints and obligations inherent in that responsibility.

Consequently, a personal relationship between a member of staff and a student, particularly where it is a romantic or sexual one, will always involve serious risks rooted in unequal power as well as real problems in maintaining the boundaries of professional and personal life. In such circumstances, staff are strongly advised to terminate any supervisory, assessment or other direct professional responsibility in connection with the student and to make alternative arrangements for the discharge of those responsibilities.

It should be noted that there are some services and functions whose work requires particular care where they are dealing with vulnerable adults as detailed in the Home Office Guidance 'Caring for Young People and the Vulnerable'. There is no strict definition of a vulnerable adult given in the Guidance. The relationship, however, would normally be based on authority and trust and the potential for exploitation so strong that any romantic or sexual relationship would be unacceptable whilst the member of staff continues in their professional capacity with that vulnerable adult. It can also cover people who go through periods of
vulnerability, for example after having a nervous breakdown and subsequently recovering. Such services where particular care is required include, but not exhaustively:

- Accommodation
- Chaplaincy
- Counselling Service
- Disability Services
- Dyslexia Services
- Equal Opportunities Office
- Staff employed within Halls or performing personal care services for students
- Student Advice and Information Centre
- Wardens and Hall staff (all such relationships must be discussed with their line manager)

Some of the services will have their own policies on relationships and these should be adhered to in addition to any guidance given within this guideline.

There are also some functions within Schools where such care is similarly necessary and this includes personal tutor roles.