

## **Staff-Student Relationships Policy**

### **1. Scope**

This policy sets out Bristol Old Vic Theatre School's (BOVTS) requirements for the maintenance of professional relationships between staff and students.

Staff who work for or with BOVTS in a professional capacity are in a position of trust towards BOVTS students and this role therefore imposes specific responsibilities and duties. In the context of this policy, staff include but are not limited to BOVTS employees (including BOVTS non-degree course delivery employees), visiting professionals (including visiting tutors and directors), self-employed contractors and all trustees including the Chair.

Visiting professionals are only covered by this policy in the context of their work for BOVTS.

Students should be aware that this policy does not cover interactions with these individuals in scenarios unconnected with their involvement with BOVTS. Students undertaking paid work at BOVTS while on an undergraduate or postgraduate programme, are not considered to be staff in the context of this policy, however professional standards would still be required in accordance with the School's Staff Code of Conduct and Student Ambassador protocols.

This policy provides staff with the definition of professional relationships with students and the specific requirements BOVTS has of staff to maintain professional boundaries. These professional boundaries must be maintained with all individuals to which staff hold a position of trust. In the context of this policy, students therefore include:

- Students who have been formally offered a place to study, or are currently studying on, an undergraduate or postgraduate programme at BOVTS
- Individuals participating in BOVTS Short Courses
- Young people with whom BOVTS engages in widening participation and outreach activities

BOVTS will take disciplinary action against a member of staff where they engage in action/s with a student/s that is prohibited in this policy. BOVTS may also take disciplinary action

against a member of staff where other day-to-day requirements set out in this policy are not met.

This policy also provides students with the definition of professional relationships with staff and therefore what they should expect as a member of the School. The ultimate responsibility for maintaining professional relationships with students lies with staff. BOVTS would therefore not normally take disciplinary action against a student if a relationship with a member of staff transgressed a professional boundary. Exceptions to this position would be if an investigation showed that a student sexually harassed, assaulted or abused a member of staff or that they purposely submitted a malicious or vexatious complaint.

BOVTS require students to act in accordance with the University West of England's [Student Conduct Policy](#) and all other student policies and procedures that are relevant respectively to undergraduate and postgraduate students, BOVTS non-degree Courses or Widening Participation and Outreach activities.

Relevant BOVTS policies to the Staff-Student Relationships Policy are:

- [Safeguarding Policy: regarding adults at risk and those under the age of 18.](#)
- [Social Media Policy: provided to staff and to students](#)
- [Intimacy Coordination Policy and Protocols](#)

On occasion, there may be a cross-over between matters in this Staff-Student Relationships Policy and those contained in other policies listed above. An example of this would be where a student is deemed vulnerable (under the age of 18 or an adult at risk) and therefore requires consideration under the Safeguarding Policy. Should such circumstances occur, BOVTS will always prioritise the needs and welfare of the student and navigate policies with care and sensitivity.

Advice and support on this policy is available from Student and Academic Services for students and from Human Resources for staff. If any member of staff or student is in doubt about any aspect of this policy or any action they should be taking, they must seek advice at the earliest opportunity.

## **2. How this policy is shared**

The Staff-Student Relationships Policy will be provided:

- On BOVTS' website so that it is accessible and transparent to the public
- To any individual (staff) who is in a position of trust towards BOVTS students through the Staff Handbook plus will be available on the School intranet

- To any individual who is offered a place to study on an undergraduate or postgraduate course (via the Terms and Conditions)
- To all students registered on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by BOVTS
- To all students registering on BOVTS non-degree Courses
- To parents, guardians or carers of any student participating in widening participation and outreach activities where the individual is under the age of 18.
- In response to any regulatory body request or other relevant organisations

### **3. Professional relationships**

The relationship between a member of staff and a student must remain strictly professional and the ultimate responsibility for this setting lies with the member of staff.

A member of staff is in a position of trust and power over a student by virtue of the professional role that they hold. Implicit in that role is an obligation on the member of staff never to place themselves in a position where the trust-and-confidence relationship is compromised or lost. If the relationship between a student and member of staff is not bound within a professional setting, this is an abuse of power and creates conflicts of interest. This setting may adversely affect the member of staff and the student as well as the ability of BOVTS to maintain an equitable learning environment for the wider cohort of students. Non-professional relationships also create reputational damage to BOVTS.

A relationship between a member of staff and a student/s cannot be professional where there are compromising factors. These include:

- Sexual or romantic relationships
- Family relationships.
- Business or financial relationships
- Grooming, coercion and any form of harassment, abuse or assault as set out in the University of the West of England and The Students' Union at UWE joint policy statement on: Zero tolerance to sexual and domestic violence, abuse and harassment
  
- The relationship between a member of staff and a student can also become non-professional where day-to-day boundaries blur through:
  - Relationships that include personal or social activities
  - Providing personal support or advice beyond the professional relationship

For clarity, the maintenance of professional relationships applies to any member of staff with any student irrespective of the course or level at which a student is studying or engaging with BOVTS.

## Requirements of staff

For staff to manage and maintain professional relationships with students, BOVTS prohibits the following actions:

- Sexual or romantic relationships between a member of staff and a student initiated during the period of admission or study. Any allegation of a sexual relationship with an individual under the age of 18 would also be referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer and/or the Police.
- Grooming or coercing of a student/s by a member of staff
- Sexual harassment, assault or abuse of a student as defined in the University of the West of England and The Students' Union at UWE joint policy statement on: Zero tolerance to sexual and domestic violence, abuse and harassment
- A member of staff inviting a student/s to their home
- A member of staff accepting an invitation to a student's home
- Physical touching of a student that goes beyond reasonable expectations of a teaching/pedagogical or professional environment, the Intimacy Coordination Policy and Protocols or where there is a legitimate health and safety risk to the individual, to others or to facilities.
- One-to-one meetings (including online) with students should only be for pedagogical, pastoral, or professional advice reasons.

BOVTS will start disciplinary procedures where it receives information about a member of staff engaging in unprofessional relationships with students, including consensual sexual or romantic relationships.

Where, following a disciplinary process, a member of staff is found to have engaged in grooming or coercion, sexual harassment, assault or abuse of a student, this will be deemed gross misconduct resulting in dismissal from BOVTS.

On a day-to-day basis, BOVTS requires the following actions of staff:

- Behaviours and communications with students must remain professional at all times. This includes communications undertaken through technology, social media, and online gaming.
- Course-related one-to-one or group meetings between staff and students must take place on BOVTS premises or equivalent where there is an external placement involved.
- Where there are occasions for staff and students to socialise collectively, for example to celebrate the success of a production, professional behaviours must be maintained.
- Friendly behaviour towards a student should not have grounds for misinterpretation; flirtation towards a student is also non-professional behaviour.

- Staff engagement with students must not constitute or be seen to constitute favouring one student or a sub-group of students within the cohort. This is not only relevant to the course setting, but also in any social or social media settings.
- Students studying on BOVTS undergraduate or postgraduate courses are directed to the Student Support Team if they require personal support.

Where a member of the Council of Trustees (the School's governing body) engages in prohibited behaviour students are advised to report this to the Chair of the Council of Trustees, who will take action in accordance with the Student Complaints Procedure. Complaints regarding the Chair of Council of Trustees in relation to this policy may be addressed to the Council Member for Safeguarding.

BOVTS will consider disciplinary action against a member of staff where they do not act in accordance with these day-to-day requirements.

This Staff-Student Relationship Policy addresses the power dynamic between staff and students and potential abuses. This power dynamic can exist for some time after a student completes a course and/or graduates with a BOVTS degree or award. BOVTS therefore expects all staff (as defined at the start of this policy) to abide by the spirit of this policy and not to abuse any power differential.

### **Expectations of students**

This Staff-Student Relationship Policy makes clear that it is the responsibility of staff to uphold their position of trust towards students and to maintain professional boundaries. As members of the BOVTS community and in accordance with UWE's Student Conduct Policy, we ask students to:

- Behave professionally towards member of staff
- Be mindful of the requirements BOVTS has of staff in relation to staff-student relationships as set out above
- Approach the Student Support Team if you need personal support and are studying on a BOVTS undergraduate or postgraduate programme
- Adhere to the policy on technology, social media, and online gaming (see section 4)
- Disclose information or concerns where you feel comfortable to do so (see section 5)

The relevant expectations will be explained appropriately to individuals under 18 participating in BOVTS's widening participation and outreach activities and their parents, guardians, or carers.

### **4. Technology, social media, and online gaming**

BOVTS's definition of professional relationships between staff and students includes actions undertaken in part or fully via technology, social media, and online gaming.

### **Requirements of staff**

The Staff Policy and Procedures Handbook sets out requirements of staff in the appropriate use of social media. This Staff-Student Relationship Policy contains the following additional requirements of staff in relation to their interactions with students:

- All communications with students must remain professional.
- You should not seek contact with students outside the purpose of your professional work.
- Only BOVTS domain accounts will be used for any social media interactions with students.
- You should not proactively 'follow' or 'friend' any BOVTS student from personal social media accounts or use any social media channels to communicate with, or comment to, students.
- BOVTS domain email and BOVTS Google accounts should be used as the primary mechanism to communicate with students via technology. Other online accounts obtained through BOVTS for the purposes of teaching and course delivery (e.g. Google Meet) may also be used as required.
- Text, direct messaging or instant messaging with students through personal accounts (e.g. Facebook messenger or WhatsApp) should not normally be used unless it is an emergency or if BOVTS domains are out of operation.
- Mobile phone communications with students should be limited to emergency situations. Different arrangements may apply if the course is being delivered on location or on placement, but professional communication behaviours must still apply.
- A student must not be approached on any web-based technologies, including dating apps
- Staff should be vigilant in maintaining their online privacy and professional standing

Staff and students should not knowingly engage together in online gaming or interact in online virtual environments

Failure to act in accordance with these requirements may lead to disciplinary action under BOVTS's Staff Disciplinary Procedure.

### **Expectations of students**

For undergraduate and postgraduate students, the School intranet sets out requirements of students in the appropriate use of social media. This Staff-Student Relationship Policy contains the additional following expectations of students:

- All communications with staff must remain professional
- You should not seek contact with staff outside the purpose of your course
- Technological communications should be limited to BOVTS domains (e.g. email, Google Meet, Google Chat)

- Text or instant messaging with staff should not normally be used
- Mobile phone communications with staff should be limited to emergency situations
- Where you choose to follow staff on social media, any interaction must remain professional
- Staff must not be approached on any web-based technologies including dating apps
- Students should be vigilant in maintaining their online privacy
- Staff and students should not knowingly engage together in online gaming or interact in online virtual environments

Failure to act in accordance with these expectations may result in action being taken under UWE's Student Non-academic Misconduct Procedure.

Similar information will be shared with students studying on non-degree Courses. The relevant expectations will be explained appropriately to individuals under 18 participating in BOVTS's widening participation and outreach activities and their parents, guardians or carers.

## **5 Disclosures**

To maintain professional boundaries in other circumstances, it is necessary for disclosures to be made so that mitigations can be taken by BOVTS to support both the member of staff, the student/s and the interests of the wider student community and the School.

### **Requirements of staff**

Disclosures should be reported to the line-manager who will involve the respective Head of Department and the HR and Business Operations Manager in agreeing next steps. Where the case relates to the line-manager, the respective Head of Department or the HR and Business Operations Manager, the next layer of management will address the situation. Where it involves the Principal, the Chair of the Council of Trustees or their nominee will be involved.

Staff must disclose the following circumstances in relation to all categories of students stated at the start of this policy:

- a. Family relationship: where an applicant or student has a family connection.
- b. A previous or longstanding sexual/romantic relationship: with an applicant or student, where the relationship existed before an application to study at BOVTS was made or where such a relationship initiated before the publication of this policy.
- c. Where a member of staff is concerned that a close relationship or attraction with a student has the potential to develop beyond a professional boundary.
- d. Where a student has or may have developed an infatuation with a member of staff.
- e. Harassment from a student.
- f. Business relationships: between a member of staff and a student should be avoided where it could compromise or be seen to compromise either party. The member of staff should disclose any proposed arrangement with the respective Head of Department to discuss the

potential implications before approaching a student. Business relationships in existence prior to a student's registration with BOVTS should be disclosed at the point of application or as soon as the member of staff becomes aware of the individual's applicant or student status. g. Where another member of staff observes that the relationship between a student and a member of staff has the potential to progress, or is progressing, beyond non-professional boundaries, they should firstly raise this with the member of staff concerned. Where the concerns remain, they must report these to the respective Head of Department or the HR and Business Operations Manager.

For points a. and b. disclosures should be made at the earliest opportunity, as soon as the member of staff becomes aware that the individual has become an applicant or student of BOVTS. Such circumstances will be managed on a case-by-case basis, however measures will normally be taken to prevent the staff member from teaching or assessing the student concerned. The member of staff must also declare a conflict of interest at any formal committee or similar setting at which the student or their course is discussed. In situations that involve decision-making about the student (such as the Assessment Board, Admissions process etc), the member of staff will absent themselves and will be represented by an alternative relevant member of staff.

### **What BOVTS asks of students**

There is no requirement for students to disclose a personal relationship with a BOVTS staff member, and there will be no sanctions imposed on a student who does not make a disclosure. We do, however, advise undergraduate, postgraduate, and non-degree course students to let us know if a personal, family or business relationship exists with a member of staff. This can be done at the point of accepting an offer (for undergraduate and postgraduate students) if the relationship exists before the student comes to BOVTS, or at any stage during a programme of study, by contacting the Admissions Team or the Director of Studies.

If a student considers that they are receiving attention from a member of staff that is beyond professional boundaries, they are advised to report this at the earliest opportunity to a responsible member of staff in accordance with UWE's Student Complaints Policy. The Safeguarding Policy will apply to individuals engaging in BOVTS's widening participation and outreach activities and parents, guardians or carers will be informed of this policy.

If an undergraduate, postgraduate, or short course student observes that the relationship between another student and a member of staff has the potential, or is progressing, beyond non-professional boundaries, they can obtain advice from a member of staff in Student and Academic Services.

Former students are also encouraged to disclose any concerns that they may have about relationships with members of BOVTS staff, by contacting the Director of Studies.



## 6 Vexatious or malicious complaints

BOVTS will take disciplinary action against a member of staff or a student where it is proven after investigation that they have purposely submitted a vexatious or malicious complaint regarding matters contained in this policy. A complaint that is vexatious or malicious is made to purposely harm one or more other individuals. This is different from a student or a member of staff having a possible or evidenced concern about the actions of another student or member of staff. If a student or member of staff is worried about the implications of raising a concern, they can speak in confidence to a member of staff in Student and Academic Services or HR.

### Appendix 1

#### Scenarios and Actions

Scenario	Power relations hip	Conflict of interest	Impact on BOVTS reputation	Staff action	Student action	BOVTS response
<b>Before a student is at BOVTS</b>						
<b>An applicant and a member of staff have previously had an intimate relationship before the student started studying at BOVTS</b>	Potentially	Yes	Potentially	Required to disclose	Advised to disclose at point of accepting an offer	Disclosure recorded. Actions will be taken on a case-by-case basis to manage the circumstances.
<b>An applicant and a member of staff have a previous or longstanding business relationship.</b>	Potentially	Yes	Potentially	Required to disclose	Advised to disclose at point of accepting an offer	Disclosure recorded. Actions will be taken on a case-by-case basis to manage the circumstances.
<b>An applicant and a member of staff have a family relationship.</b>	Yes	Yes	Potentially	Required to disclose	Advised to disclose at point of accepting an offer	Disclosure recorded. Actions will be taken on a case-by-case basis to manage the circumstances.
<b>An applicant and a member of staff have a</b>	Yes	Yes	Potentially	Required to disclose	Advised to disclose at	Disclosure recorded. Actions

<b>longstanding intimate relationship.</b>					point of accepting an offer	will be taken on a case-by-case basis to manage the circumstances.
<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Power relations hip</b>	<b>Conflict of interest</b>	<b>Impact on BOVTS reputation</b>	<b>Staff action</b>	<b>Student action</b>	<b>BOVTS response</b>
<b>While a student is at BOVTS</b>						
<b>Student and member of staff enter into a consensual intimate relationship while the student is studying at BOVTS (including online)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Advised not to	Staff disciplinary procedure
<b>Staff member grooms or coerces a student</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Student Complaints Procedure - student may choose to report to the police	Staff disciplinary procedure (gross misconduct)
<b>Sexual harassment, assault or abuse of a student</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Student Complaints Procedure - student may choose to report to the police	Staff disciplinary procedure (gross misconduct)
<b>1-1 meetings personal or social meetings (including online) with a student that are not related to the course</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Advised not to attend	Staff disciplinary procedure
<b>Member of staff invites student to their home</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Advised to decline	Staff disciplinary procedure
<b>Member of staff accepts invitation to a student's home</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Advised not to invite	Staff disciplinary procedure
<b>Physical touching of a student beyond the</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Advised to report to a	Staff disciplinary procedure

<b>reasons set out in the Staff-Student Relationship Policy.</b>					member of staff under Student Complaints Procedure or Report a Concern	
<b>Staff non-compliance with the Staff-Student Relationships Policy, including in relation to communications and behaviours (including online) and non-disclosures.</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Advised to report to a member of staff under Student Complaints Procedure or Report a Concern	Staff disciplinary procedure
<b>Student is concerned that they are receiving attention from a member of staff beyond professional boundaries</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Advised to report to a member of staff under Student Complaints Procedure or Report a Concern	Staff disciplinary procedure
<b>Member of staff makes malicious or vexatious report about another member of staff and student</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Prohibited	Advised to report to a member of staff under Student Complaints Procedure or Report a Concern	Staff disciplinary procedure
<b>Student sexually harasses, assaults or abuses a member of staff</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Report to a senior member of staff. Victim may choose to report to the police	Prohibited	Student disciplinary procedure.
<b>Student makes malicious or vexatious report about another member of staff and</b>	No	No	Yes	Report to a senior member of staff.	Prohibited	Student disciplinary procedure.

<b>student</b>						
<b>Member of staff discloses concern that a non-professional relationship with a student has potential to develop</b>	Yes	Yes	Potentially	Required to disclose	Advised not to enter into relationship	Disclosure recorded. Actions will be taken on a case-by-case basis to manage the circumstances.
<b>Member of staff is concerned about flirtatious or over-familiar behaviour by a student</b>	Yes	Yes	Potentially	Required to disclose	Advised to maintain professional behaviours	Disclosure recorded. Carefully managed conversation with the student by a neutral member of staff about professional behaviours. Circumstances monitored to ensure wellbeing of both the student and the member of staff.
<b>Member of staff is concerned about a student developing or having an infatuation.</b>	Yes	Yes	Potentially	Required to disclose	Advised to maintain professional behaviours	Disclosure recorded. Carefully managed conversation with the student by a neutral member of staff. Circumstances monitored to ensure well being of both the student and the member of staff.
<b>A member of staff has concerns about the nature of the relationship between another member of staff and student.</b>	Yes	Yes	Potentially	Encouraged to disclose	Advised to maintain professional behaviours	Member of staff discusses with member of staff. Can escalate to Head of HR and ELT.
<b>A student has concerns about the nature of the</b>	Yes	Yes	Potentially	Prohibited	Encouraged to disclose	Student discusses with student. Can

<b>relationship between another student and a member of staff</b>						escalate to Student & Academic Services.
<b>A student and a member of staff have a family relationship.</b>	Yes	Yes	Potentially	Required to disclose	Advised to disclose	Disclosure recorded. Actions will be taken on a case-by-case basis to manage the circumstances.
<b>Student and member of staff have a business relationship (including where a member of staff offers a paid professional placement to a student)</b>	Yes	Yes	Potentially	Required to disclose	Advised to disclose	Disclosure recorded. Actions will be taken on a case-by-case basis to manage the circumstances.

#### Version Control

Version	Author	Signed off by	Effective date	Changes
V1.0	Director of Studies	University of West of England	September 2024	Policy launched