

# Appropriate personal relationships and behaviours in the workplace

**Guidance | What you need to know**



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- 1 This guidance is intended to raise awareness of the issue of appropriate relationships, how they can affect fairness in the workplace, and what each individual's personal responsibilities are to declare any conflicts of interest. The guidance seeks to help our staff to understand whether a relationship could result in a negative impact on public confidence, or the ability of a force to deliver an effective and efficient police service being undermined.

This guidance is concerned with intimate or sexual relationships, rather than any other 'social' relationship.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the **Code of Ethics** which also addresses the potential impact that any relationship at work can have in terms of creating an actual or apparent conflict of interest.

This guidance is not intended to cover every situation that is faced, as every case must be determined on its own facts, but sets out the broad principles to support decision-making and professionalism.



**2** The purpose of the guidance is to ensure that staff who are in a relationship recognise when a conflict may be created and that it does not negatively impact on the work of the service or its reputation. It is not intended that a register of personal relationships is created or that our approach does not recognise that relationships exist in the service.

**3** It is imperative that all staff feel that they work in a fair, inclusive and transparent environment, where for example recruitment, promotion and development opportunities are merit-based and not influenced by any relationship.

**4** The guidance applies to all police officers, special constables, police staff and police volunteers. Guidance on **Maintaining a professional boundary between police and members of the public** is available separately.

## 5 Workplace relationships and effective policing

Relationships often exist and develop between colleagues. There are many happy relationships that form within the policing community.

Relationships must be conducted with complete professionalism, in order not to impact negatively on service delivery or public confidence.

The potential for relationships to create an actual or apparent conflict of interest at work must also be considered by the individuals involved.

## 6 Appropriate workplace relationships

In determining whether or not a relationship creates any negative impact on the legitimate aims of policing, the following factors could be considered:

- a power imbalance is not used to initiate, control or maintain the personal relationship
- physical and intimate relations do not take place on duty, or off duty on police premises including police vehicles
- the relationship does not have an adverse impact on the workplace eg, by creating division and/or friction between those in the relationship or amongst work colleagues
- there is no fear, fraud or workplace benefit driving the relationship
- the relationship has no influence on workplace decisions or activities and is not being used to gain or provide some workplace advantage
- lines of reporting are not abused or compromised.

## 7 Avoiding conflicts of interest and seeking guidance

Relationships or former relationships must not be allowed to impact adversely on conduct at work and thus on the ability of the service to achieve its legitimate aims.

If you think you have a relationship in the workplace that may create a conflict of interest or be perceived to create a conflict of interest, then you should consider whether you need to declare or manage that conflict. Your supervisor or



line manager may be suitable to assist if you require guidance to manage the conflict in a sensible and proportionate way.

It is recognised that an officer or member of staff might be reluctant, for reasons of privacy, to make such a disclosure or alternatively might feel too embarrassed to do so. If the officer or member of staff feels unable to report the conflict to their line manager for resolution, the conflict of interest could be reported to another line manager.

Where a former relationship causes an adverse impact or a conflict occurs, this should also be considered and declared or managed in the same way.

If the individuals involved in the relationship do not believe that there is any conflict of interest, then no further action is required. If there is any doubt, then advice could be sought from a line manager.

Conflicts can occur in the following cases:

- line-management activity
- recruitment, promotion or selection processes, including tutoring, mentoring and coaching
- decisions relating to disciplinary, Unsatisfactory Performance Procedures (UPP) or grievance procedures
- decisions relating to pay or remuneration, including overtime
- decisions regarding access to training or Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- decisions (eg, deployment), that may lead to perceptions of unfairness by those involved in the relationship or by others.

## 8 Responsibilities of line managers

When an individual seeks guidance from his/her line manager or another manager, that manager must ensure that they sensitively and confidentially address the possible conflict. They should consider:

- the nature of the relationship
- any evidence that it may cause a conflict of interest
- any reasonably foreseeable negative impact on the ability of the service to deliver its legitimate aims, ie, service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness
- any reasonably foreseeable damage to public confidence/force reputation
- any reasonably foreseeable adverse impact in the workplace.

The **National Decision Model** and **Code of Ethics** will be used in these considerations. Where the relationship does not cause any concerns, then no further action will be required.

Where a line manager believes that a relationship causes a conflict of interest but has not been reported, then the manager should discuss this privately and separately with the individuals concerned. This will allow the supervisor to make an assessment and explore options to manage the conflict in a sensible and proportionate way. Each case must be treated sensitively and on its own merits and fairly in accordance with equality legislation.

Where faced with a relationship that does suggest an actual or apparent conflict of interest, then the manager should only take such actions that are necessary and proportionate to manage the identified risks. The needs and rights of the



individuals concerned must not be compromised unless necessary to do so. Supervisors should exercise caution when dealing with an LGBTQ+ relationship. In these and all other cases, care should be taken when considering what information is to be shared with others.

On occasions, it may be necessary to make changes to the working practices of officers or staff members whose relationships give rise to an actual or apparent conflict of interest. Where it is considered necessary and proportionate to take action, such measures might include:

- requiring officers or staff members to remove themselves from the decision-making process in relation to promotion/selection/discipline
- requiring officers or staff members not to work on the same shift together or requiring officers or staff members to no longer work in the same team
- in exceptional circumstances, redeploying one or both of the individuals based on a reasonable and documented consideration of all the facts in the case.

It is emphasised that this guidance should not be a tool with which to take disciplinary action against individuals. Its purpose is to make the force's expectations clear to all individuals within the policing community.

## 9 Relationships involving tutors, line managers and senior officers

Where a relationship involves any power imbalance, such as with tutors, trainers, line managers and senior officers, then it will always have the potential for a conflict of interest. These relationships should be carefully considered by the individuals involved and, if appropriate, guidance sought. Where a conflict of interest exists that would have an adverse impact on the service, the perception of the public of the service, or any individual, necessary and proportionate steps should be taken to ensure that the conflict is mitigated or other appropriate action taken depending on the facts of the case (for example reallocation of a tutor, or change in line manager).

## 10 Responsibilities

The expectation to manage a potential conflict of interest rests with the individuals concerned. However, if a colleague is involved in a relationship that has the potential to result in a conflict of interest then you are encouraged to report this matter.

Reporting can be to any line manager or via the confidential hotline or other routes as described in the **College of Policing Reporting Concerns** guidance.

Supervisors and managers are expected to ensure this guidance and the **Code of Ethics** is followed.



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