

SI0223

Appropriate Personal Relationships and Behaviours in the Workplace

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This Service Instruction is intended to raise awareness of the issue of appropriate relationships, how they can affect perceptions of fairness in the workplace, and outlines each individual's personal responsibilities to declare any conflicts of interest.

The instruction seeks to help our Staff and Officers to understand whether a relationship could undermine the Police Service of Northern Ireland's ability to deliver an effective and efficient policing service.

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1. Introduction

This Service Instruction is intended to raise awareness of the issue of appropriate personal relationships, how they can affect perceptions of fairness in the workplace, and to outline each individual's personal responsibilities to declare conflicts of interest.

This Service Instruction seeks to support Police Officers and Police Staff to understand whether a relationship could result in a negative impact on public confidence, or undermine the ability of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to deliver an effective and efficient policing service.

It is imperative that all staff feel that they work in a safe, dignified, fair, inclusive and transparent environment, where recruitment, promotion and development opportunities are not influenced by personal relationships.

This instruction makes no judgement on any personal relationship nor is it intended to prevent relationships developing. It is concerned principally with intimate or sexual relationships, but may in certain

circumstances, extend to close personal relationships.

This instruction should be read in conjunction with the [PSNI Code of Ethics](#) and the Police Staff Handbook.

2. Aims

The purpose of this Service Instruction is to assist our Officers and Staff in recognising that conflicts may be created when a relationship between colleagues is formed in the workplace. It provides a framework to address any adverse impacts of such a relationship on the individuals involved, their colleagues and the public.

This instruction is not intended to create a register of personal relationships but to ensure that relationships do not impact on service delivery or public confidence. This instruction is not intended to cover every situation but will assist the reader with principles and guidance to support professional decision-making.

3. Applicability

The Service Instruction applies to all Police Officers and Police Staff. References to 'workforce' in this guidance refer to both Police Officers and Police Staff unless stated otherwise.

Guidance on maintaining professional boundaries between Police Officers and members of the Public is available separately.¹

4. Workplace Relationships and Effective Policing

Relationships often exist and develop between colleagues. There are many happy relationships that form in the policing community. This Service Instruction does not prevent such relationships from forming.

Relationships must be conducted with complete professionalism, to avoid them negatively impacting on service delivery or public confidence.

The potential for relationships to create an actual or perceived conflict of interest at work must be considered by the individuals involved, their Supervisors and Line Management.

5. Appropriate Workplace Relationships

In determining whether or not a relationship creates any negative impact on the legitimate aims of policing, a number of factors must be considered, including, but not limited to, the following:

- A power imbalance is not used to initiate, control or maintain the personal relationship. This may relate not only to rank or grade, a power imbalance could exist between an individual in a specialist post and another who is not.
- Physical relations whilst on duty are not acceptable under any circumstances.
- The relationship is respectful, professional and does not have an adverse impact on colleagues or work.

¹ Maintaining Professional Boundaries – Service Instruction 32/17

- 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 any sort of workplace advantage.
- Lines of management reporting remain unaffected by the relationship.

The perceptions of others is a parameter for consideration in any of the factors outlined above.

6. Avoiding Conflicts of Interest and Seeking Guidance

Relationships, or former relationships, must not be allowed to impact adversely on behaviour at work and thus on the ability of the PSNI to achieve its policing purpose.

Where there is a reasonable likelihood that the relationship may lead to, or be perceived by others as, a conflict of interest then the relationship must be reported to a Line Manager. This must occur at any stage of a relationship where a perceived or actual conflict may arise.

It is recognised that an individual may be reluctant to report the relationship for personal reasons. However, in the interests of maintaining public confidence and service delivery, it is the responsibility of both individuals involved to report the relationship at the earliest opportunity.

If there is conflict of interest with a Line Manager, the matter may be reported to another Line Manager.

This also applies to former relationships.

Conflicts can occur in the following cases:

- Line Management activity;
- Teams;
- Recruitment, promotion or selection processes, including tutoring, mentoring and coaching;
- Decisions relating to misconduct/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 (e.g. deployment), that may lead to perceptions of unfairness by those involved in the relationship or by others;

These are non-exhaustive examples, and a level of objective reasonableness should be applied in each case.

7. Relationships involving a Police Officer with a more Senior Officer, or, member of staff with a more senior Staff member

Where a relationship involves a clear power imbalance, such as:

- Between a Probationary Constable and a Probationer Support Officer, or ,
- A Student Officer and Police Trainer, or,

- A Senior Officer and a Constable, then there will always be the potential for a conflict of interest, whether that be perceived or actual.²

Such a relationship must be reported to ensure suitable safeguards are implemented to protect the individuals involved and ensure that Public confidence and service delivery are not affected.

Suitable safeguards may include role adjustment, repositioning, change in Line Manager or reallocation of a Police Trainer.

Where individuals fail to report such a relationship or refuse to adhere to instructions, then misconduct/disciplinary proceedings will be considered.

In the event that a relationship continues to have the potential to impact on public confidence or service delivery, the Chief Constable may consider the Service Confidence Procedure.³

²

Police College Code of Practice on College Staff Relationships with Prospective Student Officers, Student Officers and Probationer Constables

³ Service Confidence - Service Instruction 06/18 (Police Officers only)

8. Responsibilities of Line

Managers

When a disclosure is made to a Line Manager it will be their duty to ensure that it is dealt with sensitively and in confidence.

They should consider:

- The nature of the relationship
- Any evidence or perception that it may cause a conflict of interest
- Any reasonably foreseeable negative impacts on service delivery
- Any reasonably foreseeable damage to public confidence / force reputation
- Any reasonably foreseeable adverse impact in the workplace.

The **National Decision Model, Code of Ethics** or **Police Staff Handbook** will be used in these considerations.

The manager should record the facts, their assessment and action taken. This must be stored confidentially.

Where the relationship does not give concern then both individuals are to be

informed accordingly and no further action taken.

Where a Line Manager believes that a relationship is ongoing that has the potential to cause a conflict of interest, but it has not yet been reported, the Line Manager must approach the individuals involved and encourage the facts to be reported. Only then can a full assessment be made.

Any failure by the individuals involved to adhere to this guidance, or be dishonest in anyway, in the course of the process may result in misconduct/disciplinary proceedings.

Any action that engages an individual's Rights under ECHR must be carefully considered and balanced against public confidence in the PSNI and service delivery.

In all cases, line manager's should carefully consider what, if any information, is shared with others; accepting that managing a conflict of interest may require further reporting.

Where it is considered necessary a Line Manager may have to employ proportionate and relevant measures which may include but are not limited to:

- Removing officers or Staff members 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
- Redeploying one or both of the individuals. This will be considered only in exceptional circumstances and based on a reasonable and documented consideration of all the facts in the case.

Assistance and guidance from Human Resources will be made available in all circumstances where necessary measures are required.

9. Responsibilities

Individuals involved in relationships are required to take steps to report any potential conflicts as outlined.

A colleague who suspects that such a relationship has not been reported, has a positive obligation to report the matter either to a Line Manager or via confidential reporting procedures.⁴

Supervisors and Managers are expected to ensure this guidance, [National Decision Model](#), [PSNI Code of Ethics](#) or **Police Staff Handbook** is followed.

⁴ Whistleblowing - Service Instruction 31/17

Appendix A Contact Us

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