Australian universities condemn romantic supervisor-student relationships

*The country is one of the first to issue national guidelines on dealing with such relationships.*

**NEWS**

Nature -  06 AUGUST 2018

Academics should be removed from their supervisory, teaching or assessment roles if they develop a romantic relationship with one of their students, say organizations that represents Australian universities and students.

[Guidelines](https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/Media-and-Events/media-releases/Relationships-between-academic-supervisors-and-their-students-are-never-okay#.W2SBR1OUtuW) released on 1 August state that romantic relationships between academic supervisors and their students are never appropriate because they create a power imbalance. Although some institutions have their own policies in place for addressing such situations, Australia is one of the first countries to issue national principles. They were developed by four organizations that represent the country's universities, academics, as well postgraduate students.

Catriona Jackson, head of Universities Australia, one of the groups that helped write the guidelines, in Canberra, said that sexual or romantic relationships that develop between an academic and their student also raises questions about consent and academic integrity.

The guidelines were developed in response to a 2017 survey of more than [30,000 Australian university students](https://www.nature.com/news/australian-students-report-high-rates-of-sexual-harassment-and-assault-1.22397?WT.mc_id=TWT_NatureNews&sf103527174=1) about their experiences of sexual harassment or sexual assault. It found that postgraduate students were almost twice as likely as undergraduates to have been sexually harassed by a lecturer or tutor.

A spokesperson for the Australian Academy of Science in Canberra welcomed the guidelines. But the academy also said the guidelines are not intended to replace institutional approaches to dealing with unacceptable behaviours.

*doi: 10.1038/d41586-018-05884-6*

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05884-6>