



# The MAST Academy Trust

<b>Policy</b>	Personal relationships at work policy	
<b>Owner</b>	Executive Lead: Governance, People and Communications	
<b>Date approved</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> July 2023	
<b>Approver</b>	Trust Board	
Date consulted on with recognised trade unions		6 <sup>th</sup> June 2023
Date adopted following consultation process on		6 <sup>th</sup> June 2023

<b>Current version</b>	V3.0
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<b>Next review due</b>	Summer 2026
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<b>Objective of Policy</b>
The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on managing personal relationships between staff within the Mast Academy Trust and schools.

Version Control	
Version Number	Summary of amends from previous version
1.0	Development of policy
2.0	Amends to policy following union advice. 5.2.5: Separation into bullets of section 5.2.6: additional confirmation that information will be securely destroyed.
3.0	3 – year review. Adjustment to advice contact in 5.1.3; addition of appendix b for equality impact assessment

Sign off requirements			
Approvers		Position	
Staffing Committee		Trust Board	
Reviewers		Position	
Natasha Greenough		CEO The MAST	
Dorcas Atkinson		Trustee	
Unions consulted			
ASCL	GMB	NEU, (ATL)	NAHT
NASUWT	UNISON	UNITE	

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## **1.0 Policy statement**

1.1 In order to maintain the Mast Academy Trust and their school's integrity and reputation for inclusion, it is necessary to acknowledge when personal and professional relationships overlap. While most personal connections will be positive in that they will promote good team working and professional bonds, it is recognised that there will be some relationships that may require an employee to withdraw from certain decisions or from undertaking certain duties to protect themselves and the Mast Academy Trust from any conflict of interest, misuse of power or unfair bias.

## **2.0 Purpose**

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on managing personal relationships between staff within the Mast Academy Trust and schools. Our definition of a personal, professional and working relationship is outlined in Appendix A.

2.2 This policy aims to protect the integrity of colleagues and to recognise any power imbalance that may affect welfare and inclusion. It is not about prohibiting personal relationships at work, but to provide guidance to manage actual or potential conflicts of interest and to establish appropriate standards.

## **3.0 Scope**

3.1 This policy applies to all staff of the Mast Academy Trust. For the purposes of this policy, employees, casual workers, agency workers, contractors and any third party engaged to work within the Mast Academy Trust and volunteers are included.

## **4.0 Relationships between employees**

4.1 Personal relationships between employees will normally pose no conflict of interest unless there is a professional or working relationship between the individuals.

4.2 It is understood that employees may develop close, personal friendships with individuals. If employees have a professional or working relationship with someone that they consider to be a close, personal friend, they must ensure that their friendship with the individual does not impact, or appear to impact, the ability to perform their role.

4.3 Where a personal relationship exists or develops between employees who are in a line management or supervisory relationship at work, they must avoid participating in decisions that might raise the appearance of a conflict such as recruitment and selection, allocation of research grants/funding, academic development/appraisal, disciplinary matters, sign off of expenses or in any other management activity or process involving the other party. This list is not exhaustive and is only intended to provide examples of conflict of interest activities.

Where a personal relationship exists between colleagues who are in direct line management, the trust may make reasonable adjustments such as relocate a colleague or adjust roles/line management where appropriate. This will be done in consultation with colleagues but is in the interests of protecting all parties against potential or perceived conflicts of interests or potential or perceived misuse of power.

## 5.0 Procedures

### 5.1 Employee obligation

- 5.1.1 Employees must declare any existing or new personal relationships they have that may give rise to an actual or potential conflict of interest, misuse of power or unfair bias. If an employee has a personal relationship with an individual to whom they have, or are scheduled to have any such professional or working relationship as defined in Appendix A, the employee must:
- Inform their CEO or Headteacher (as appropriate) of this relationship as soon as it becomes known. This notification should include the names of both individuals; the level of management/supervision the employee has with the individual or the level of interaction they have over work matters that could potentially become a legitimate concern for the Trust.
  - Withdraw from any professional relationship or work related tasks with the individual until the CEO or Headteacher (as appropriate) has taken the appropriate action.
- 5.1.2 If an individual suspects and/or witnesses that a personal relationship has overlapped with a professional or working relationship, the process outlined at 5.1.1 must be followed. The individual can request to remain anonymous if they wish. Any employee found to have made a vexatious complaint will face disciplinary action. Should there be evidence that conduct that is detrimental to the employer has or is taking place appropriate policies will be followed.
- 5.1.3 If the employee is unsure whether or not the personal relationship could give rise to an actual or potential conflict of interest, misuse of power or unfair bias situation, the employee should contact the Trust HR team in the first instance for advice and guidance.

### 5.2 Trust/School obligation

- 5.2.1 Once the CEO or Headteacher (as appropriate) has been notified of the personal relationship, they will assess the situation and identify if there is a conflict of interest. If there is, they must take immediate steps to ensure that the employee will have no direct involvement in the management of the other party as outlined in 4.3.
- 5.2.2 The CEO or Headteacher (as appropriate) will notify a Chair of Trustees/Chair of Governors. This notification should include the names of the individuals; the level of management/supervision the employee has with the individual or the level of interaction they have over work matters and clarification as to the reason this represents, or is perceived to represent, a conflict of interest, misuse of power or unfair bias situation.
- 5.2.3 The CEO or Headteacher (as appropriate) in collaboration with the Chair of Trustees/Chair of Governors will take appropriate action which will usually entail the identification of ways in which both parties can continue working in the trust albeit separately. This may include (but is not limited to):

- Moving one or both parties to another school within the Trust

- Moving the individual to report under another employee unrelated to the situation.
- Amending the employee's duties so that they do not have sole responsibility for the individual's work.

5.2.4 Any action will be undertaken only after full consultation with the individuals concerned. However, should the situation be considered to raise legal concerns or constitute a disciplinary matter, then the Trust will take appropriate direct and immediate action. Care will be taken to ensure the approach is not discriminatory.

5.2.5 If it is not possible to implement any of the options listed in 5.2.3;

- or equivalent other options e.g. due to no suitable open vacancies or alternative line managers/supervisors;
- or if the employee/s refuse to agree to the offered solutions;

the Trust/school reserves the right to take other action as appropriate.

Dismissal will only be undertaken as a last resort in circumstances where no other course of action is reasonably open to the Trust/school and where the situation justifies such action (see section 6 below).

5.2.6 If action has been taken, this will be appropriately documented and saved securely onto the employee's personal record. Employees have the right to request that this information is removed from their personal file if circumstances change e.g. if there is no longer a personal relationship or if the personal relationship no longer bears any conflict of interest. Any information removed will be securely destroyed.

## **6.0 Non-compliance**

6.1 Any breaches of 5.1.1 may result in disciplinary action being taken against the employee.

6.2 Any behaviour that is considered inappropriate (i.e. evidence of unfair bias/personal conflicts brought into the workplace) will be investigated under the Mast Academy Trust Disciplinary Policy. Any unwanted personal contact after a relationship has ended that the colleague may feel has led to bullying and harassment in the workplace should be reported in accordance with the grievance policy. [Policies | The Mast Multi Academy Trust](#)

## Appendix A: Definitions

- A **personal relationship** is defined as a romantic, intimate, sexual and/or exclusive relationship; a family relationship; a business/commercial or financial relationship; or a relationship which involves an emotional attachment. *This definition is not exhaustive and therefore anyone who considers that they may be in a potential conflict of interest situation should declare this following the procedures outlined in section 6 of this policy.*
- A **professional relationship** is defined as one where there is an assessing, supervising, managing, tutoring, teaching or pastoral connection with the individual; for instance a line manager or lecturer or a role that provides some other support such as mentoring, coaching or training to that individual.
- A **working relationship** is defined as individuals who are in a personal relationship and do not have a professional relationship but could still be in a situation that would potentially cause a conflict of interest, misuse of power or unfair bias situation occurring. E.g. a peer to peer relationship where the employees have to liaise and cooperate over work matters.

## Appendix B: Equality Impact Assessment

Name of policy being assessed	Statement of allegations of abuse against staff
Summary of aims and objectives of the policy	Refer to page 1
What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)	Refer to page 2
Who is affected by the policy?	All employees
What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy?	Annual review

Protected Characteristic Group	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g. adjustment to the policy)
Disability	Neutral impact	The policy is inclusive for all colleagues.	NA
Gender reassignment	Neutral impact	The policy is inclusive for all colleagues.	NA
Marriage or civil partnership	Neutral impact	The policy is inclusive for all colleagues.	NA
Pregnancy and maternity	Neutral impact	The policy is inclusive for all colleagues.	NA
Race	Neutral impact	The policy is inclusive for all colleagues.	NA
Religion or belief	Neutral impact	The policy is inclusive for all colleagues.	NA
Sexual orientation	Neutral impact	The policy is inclusive for all colleagues.	NA
Sex (gender)	Neutral impact	The policy is inclusive for all colleagues.	NA

Age	Neutral impact	The policy is inclusive for all colleagues.	NA
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## Evaluation

Question	Explanation / justification
Is it possible the proposed policy or change in policy could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?	<u>No: the changes made during this policy update encourage an inclusive culture across all colleagues working at The Mast Trust.</u>

## Final decision

Please indicate the final decision using the options below	1
What is the explanation for this?	
No changes to the policy that would discriminate.	

There are four options open to you:

1. No barriers or impact identified, therefore policy will **proceed**.
2. You can decide to **stop** the policy or practice at some point because the evidenceshows bias towards one or more groups
3. You can **adapt or change** the policy in a way which you think will eliminate the bias, or
4. Barriers and impact identified, however having considered all available options carefully, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the aim of the policy or practice (e.g. in **extreme cases** or where **positive action** is taken). Therefore, you are going to **proceed with caution** with this policy or practice knowing that it may favour some people less than others, providing justification for this decision.

Will this EIA be published* Yes/Not required	Yes
Date completed:	2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2023
Review date (if applicable):	Summer 2024