



SECTION	People and Culture
POLICY	Relationships in the work place
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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to maintain a safe, respectful, professional and inclusive working environment by discouraging workplace close personal relationships where they may create actual or perceived conflicts of interest, abuse of power, favouritism, safeguarding concerns, or risks of sexual harassment.

Club Doncaster recognises that consensual relationships may develop between Employees or between Employees and customers. However, such relationships can create risks to professional boundaries, team dynamics, Employee wellbeing, safeguarding obligations, and organisational integrity.

This policy aims to:

- Promote professionalism and appropriate workplace conduct.
- Minimise conflicts of interest and perceptions of bias or favouritism.
- Protect Employees, customers, children and vulnerable adults from inappropriate behaviour, coercion, harassment, or abuse of authority.
- Ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the organisations safeguarding and anti-harassment obligations.
- Provide a framework for disclosure and management of close personal relationships where necessary.

Club Doncaster does not seek to interfere unreasonably in Employees' private lives.

However, where personal relationships affect the workplace, professional responsibilities, or welfare of others, the organisation may take reasonable steps to manage associated risks.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Employees, Workers, contractors, volunteers, agency staff and anyone representing the organisation, regardless of seniority or position.

The policy applies to:

- Employee-to-Employee relationships;
- Employee-to-customer relationships;
- Relationships involving contractors, volunteers, or third parties connected with the organisation;
- Relationships that develop inside or outside of the workplace where there may be an impact on work, safeguarding or professional responsibilities.

The policy includes romantic, intimate, sexual familial and close personal relationships that could influence workplace conduct, decision-making, safeguarding, or the working environment.

3. Definitions

- **Close personal relationship**

A close personal relationship includes:

- Spouses or civil partners;
- Individuals involved in a romantic, intimate, emotional, or sexual relationship;
- Cohabiting partners;
- Close familial relationships;
- Relationships that existed prior to employment or developed during employment.

- **Department**

For the purposes of this policy, 'department' means Employees reporting directly to the same line manager.

- **Pre-existing relationship**

A relationship that existed:

- Before the introduction of this policy; or
- Before either individual commenced employment with the organisation.

- **Position of trust**

A role involving authority, influence, safeguarding responsibility, decision-making power, or direct responsibility for the welfare, progression, supervision, or assessment of another person.

4. General principles

- **Professional conduct**

All Employees are expected to behave professionally and maintain appropriate boundaries at work regardless of any personal relationship.

Employees must ensure that personal relationships do not:

- Negatively affect workplace performance or attendance.
- Compromise professional judgement.
- Create actual or perceived favouritism.
- Impact team morale or working relationships.
- Create an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment.
- Undermine safeguarding responsibilities or public confidence in the organisation.

The organisation discourages close personal relationships in circumstances where there is a power imbalance, safeguarding concern, reporting relationship, or risk of conflict of interest.

- **Disclosure requirements**

Employees must disclose any close personal relationship where there may be:

- Direct or indirect reporting relationship.
- Managerial influence or decision-making authority.
- Safeguarding responsibilities.
- Potential conflict of interest.
- Customer influence or commercial impact.
- Any risk to professional boundaries or workplace conduct.

Disclosure should be made promptly to the People and Culture Department to allow appropriate consideration and management of potential risks.

Failure to disclose a relevant relationship may result in disciplinary action.

- **Transparency and management of risk**

Following a disclosure, the organisation may assess:

- Actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
- Safeguarding implications.
- Risks relating to harassment, coercion, or abuse of authority.
- Operational or reputation risks.
- Effects on team dynamics or Employee wellbeing.

Where appropriate, reasonable measures may be implemented, including, but not limited to:

- Changes to reporting lines.

- Reassignment of duties.
- Restrictions on decision-making authority.
- Alternative management arrangements.
- Temporary or permanent redeployment.

5. Employee-to-Employee relationships

Employees must not be involved in decisions affecting someone with whom they have a close personal relationship, including:

- Recruitment;
- Pay;
- Promotion;
- Appraisals;
- Allocation of work;
- Disciplinary action;
- Grievance matters;
- Capability or performance management.

Where such circumstances arise, the organisation may alter reporting structures or responsibilities to remove conflicts of interest.

Employees must maintain professional standards at all times.

The following behaviour may be considered inappropriate:

- Public displays of affection.
- Excessive personal communications during work;
- Favouritism or preferential treatment;
- Exclusionary behaviour affecting colleagues;
- Arguments or personal disputes in the workplace;
- Conduct that creates discomfort for others.

If a relationship ends, both parties are expected to continue behaving professionally and respectfully.

The organisation takes particularly seriously relationships involving a power imbalance or safeguarding responsibility.

It is generally inappropriate and may be prohibited for individuals in positions of trust to pursue or engage in close personal relationships with:

- Direct or indirect reports.
- Junior Employees where influence or authority exists.
- Apprentices, trainees or interns.
- Children or vulnerable adults.
- Individuals subject to safeguarding responsibilities.

Examples of positions of trust within Club Doncaster include, but are not limited to:

- Senior executive officers.
- Safeguarding staff.
- Coaches or staff working with children or vulnerable adults.
- Managers with supervisory responsibility.

Any concerns in relation to abuse of authority, coercion, grooming or safeguarding risks will be investigated formally.

6. Sexual harassment prevention

The organisation is committed to providing a working environment free from sexual harassment, victimisation, intimidation, and inappropriate conduct.

Sexual harassment is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010 and will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

- **Definition of sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment includes unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Unwanted comments, jokes or messages;
- Inappropriate touching or physical contact;
- Sexual advances or pressure for relationships;
- Sharing sexually explicit material;
- Intrusive questions about someone's private life;
- Repeated unwanted invitations or communications;
- Abuse of power to pursue personal or sexual relationships.

Conduct may amount to harassment even if it was not intended to offend.

- **Consent and professional boundaries**

Any relationship must be genuinely consensual and free from pressure, intimidation, coercion or abuse of authority.

Consent may not be freely given where there is a significant imbalance of power or influence.

Employees must not use their position to:

- Pursue inappropriate personal relationships.
- Seek sexual favours.
- Pressure others into social or intimate contact.
- Retaliate against someone who rejects advances or raises concerns.

- **Reporting concerns**

Employees are encouraged to report concerns relating to:

- Sexual harassment
- Inappropriate behaviour
- Abuse of power
- Coercion
- Retaliation
- Breaches of professional boundaries.

Concerns may be raised with:

- People and Culture department
- A line manager
- Safeguarding personnel
- A senior executive officer

All reports will be treated seriously and handled as sensitively and confidentially as possible.

No Employee will suffer victimisation for raising a genuine concern or participating in an investigation.

7. Employee-to-customer relationships

- **Professional boundaries**

Employees must maintain appropriate professional boundaries with customers, clients, service users, and stakeholders.

Relationships with customers may create heightened risks including:

- Safeguarding concerns;
- Exploitation or perceived exploitation;
- Favouritism;
- Reputational damage;
- Conflicts of interest;
- Allegations of misconduct or harassment.

Employees must disclose any close personal relationship with a customer where there is potential for conflict or professional concern.

- **Conflicts of interest**

Employees must not:

- Provide preferential treatment;
- Allow personal relationships to influence professional decisions;
- Exploit customer relationships for personal benefit;
- Accept inappropriate gifts or benefits.

The organisation may reassign duties or customer responsibilities where necessary.

8. Management support and resolution

Where relationship-related concerns arise, the organisation may:

- Provide mediation or facilitated discussions.
- Offer HR guidance and support.
- Implement temporary management arrangements.
- Take safeguarding or disciplinary action, where necessary.

The organisation reserves the right to take reasonable action prevent Employees, customers, operational effectiveness and organisational reputation.

9. Failure to comply with policy

Failure to comply with this policy, including failure to disclose relevant relationships or breaches of professional boundaries, may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Serious breaches involving harassment, coercion, safeguarding concerns, abuse of authority, discrimination, or victimisation may be treated as gross misconduct.