



## Managing working relationships

### **Introduction**

From the SOS Pilot Survey 2021, only around 50% of science teachers feel that they get on well with their colleagues. However, when relationships within a science department is strong, science teachers highly value those relationships. Science departments are often large departments and so have many people working in the same area. As a leader, dealing with and maintaining working relationships between staff is a key issue.

### **Working relationships can become strained when:**

- There is actual or perceived inequity, injustice or favouritism.
- Personal or professional conduct is poor.
- There is unhealthy competition or jealousy
- Poor team players, people not pulling their weight.
- Disagreement about policies, practices, expectations.

### **Reviewing structures and systems within the science department and school.**

Preventing issues arising can be useful. Consider these questions:

- Are there structures or systems that can create disharmony, conflict or resentment?
- Are there situations where some teachers are treated more fairly than others?
- Are conflicts managed decisively and quickly?
- Is underperformance and unprofessional behaviour dealt with quickly and appropriately?
- Is everybody acknowledged or rewarded in the same way for all?
- Are there actual (due to work spaces) or perceived divisions within the team?

### **Team building**

- Making sure that staff have opportunities to work together to deal with an issue can be good at bringing people together. Having a shared goal and drawing on each others' strengths can be beneficial.
- Acknowledging, praising and rewarding those who are behaving collegiately.
- Giving staff opportunity spend time together e.g. break times, working together before or after school.

### **Addressing relationship issues directly**

When there are disagreements, conflicts or relationship breakdowns within the science department, they need to be dealt with quickly and supported in repairing the relationship. Although it can be challenging, dealing with fall out quickly can be effective and stop things deteriorating further. This should always be done face to face, not by email, letter or text.

### **Stepping in**

If a member of staff's behaviour is unprofessional or breaches professional standards, the science manager or line manger needs to step in and take disciplinary action. However, most conflict between staff is not of this nature and is often due to poor communication or misunderstandings.

### **Dealing with a member of staff who is causing conflict**

Arrange a one-to-one meeting, present the issues and support/coach/mentor or if necessary use formal procedures to change behaviours.

### **Encouraging resolution on their own**

If a colleague tells you they have been upset or feel aggrieved by the actions or behaviour of another colleague, supporting them to address the situation themselves can sometimes be a quick and easy resolution to small disagreements.

### **Mediation**

Mediation is where someone (a manager or an independent individual) sits down with two staff members who are in disagreement, conflict or upset by something and addressing the situation with the view to have agreed outcomes to move forward. For more detailed information consider [this resource](#) from the CIPD, or [this piece](#) from Harvard Business Review.