



**South Gloucestershire and Stroud Academy Trust (SGSAT)**

## **Freedom of Information policy and procedures**

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|--|---|
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| <b>Job Title/Role:</b>                 | Chief Group Services Officer  |
| <b>Ref. No.:</b><br><br><b>QPG 004</b> | <b>Date of this version:</b> July 2018<br><br><b>Review date:</b> April 2019<br><br><b>Upload to SGSAT Website?</b> Yes |
| <b>Approved by:</b>                    | SGSAT Board of Trustees   |
| <b>Date:</b>                           | 11 July 2018  |

## Mandatory Initial Equality and Diversity Impact Screening

|  |   |   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| Main aim and purpose of the policy:  | This policy sets out the Trust's approach to ensuring compliance with the Freedom of Information act.                     |   |   |   |  |
| Is this policy (or its constituent parts) relevant to a general equality duty? (please tick)   | This policy development will assist in the elimination of unlawful discrimination and/or harassment of identified groups? | Implementation of this policy will promote equal opportunities for identified groups? | Implementation of this policy will promote positive attitudes and participation between groups? | Implementation of this policy will promote good relations between groups?                     |  |
| <b>Age</b>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Disability</b>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Gender Reassignment</b>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Race or Ethnicity</b>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Religion or Belief</b>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Marriage</b>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Pregnancy/ Maternity</b>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Sex</b>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Sexual Orientation</b>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Carers/ Care givers</b>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| <b>Persons in care</b>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Specify any groups for which there is evidence or reason to believe that some groups or individuals could be affected differently:         |   |   |   |   |  |
| None   |   |   |   |   |  |
| How much evidence is there:  | None  | A little  | Some  | A lot   |  |
| <b>Is there any concern that the policy may operate in a discriminatory way?</b>   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |
|  | None  | A little  | Some  | A lot   |  |
|  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  |  |
| Assessed relevance to equality (tick one row only)   | High  | Med   | Low   | None  | Brief reason for this assessment       |
| Age  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Disability   | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Gender Reassignment  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Race or Ethnicity  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Religion or Belief   | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Marriage   | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Pregnancy/ Maternity   | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Sex  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Sexual Orientation   | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| Carers/ Care givers  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |  |
| What is the next step? (tick one only)   | What priority level is this policy?   |   |   | Has the Policy been sent for Full EQIA, or do you believe the policy should have a Full EQIA? |  |
|  | High <input type="checkbox"/>   | Medium <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>  | Low <input type="checkbox"/>  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/>  | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>I am satisfied that an initial screening has been carried out on this policy/procedure and a full Impact Assessment is not required</b> |   |   |   |   |  |
| <b>Completed by:</b> Moira Foster-Fitzgerald <b>Position:</b> Chief Group Services Officer <b>Date:</b> July 2018                          |   |   |   |   |  |

# Freedom of Information policy and procedures

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. SGS Academy Trust ('the Trust') is committed to transparency in its dealings with the public and fully embraces the aims of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ('FoIA'). The Trust will make every effort to meet its obligations under the respective legislation and will regularly review procedures to ensure that it is doing so.
- 1.2. The underlying principle of this policy is that the public have a right to access to recorded information held by the Trust and that the Trust should seek to promote an open regime regarding access to information, subject to the exemptions contained within the relevant legislation.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1. The FoIA applies to all public authorities and came fully into force on 1st January 2005. It provides the public with a statutory right of access to recorded information held by authorities, subject to certain exemptions, within twenty working days. The Act is fully retrospective and applies to all information that falls within the scope of the Act, not just information created from 1st January 2005. Section 19 of the Act also obliges the Trust to make information pro-actively available in the form of an approved "publication scheme".
- 2.2. In addition, individuals currently have a statutory right of access to their own "personal data" under the DPA. Individual access rights to personal data are extended by the FoIA through amendments to the access provisions of the DPA (refer to the SGSAT Data Protection Policy).
- 2.3. The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 ('EIR') provides a statutory right of access to "environmental information", as defined in these regulations. The EIR came into force on 1st January 2005 and replaces the existing 1992 Regulations. The EIR are also fully retrospective.
- 2.4. The Government's Information Commissioner enforces these three information regimes.
- 2.5. Each regime contains certain categories of exempt information, where information can be withheld. Any decision to withhold information under an exemption can be referred by the applicant to the Information Commissioner, who can overturn any decision to withhold information. For the purposes of this policy, the "public" is defined as any individual or organisation anywhere in the world and an "information request" refers to any request for recorded information made under the FoIA, EIR or DPA.

## **3. Related policies, procedures and guidelines**

- SGSAT Complaints Policy and Procedure
- SGSAT Data Protection Policy and Procedure
- SGSAT Data Retention guidelines

## **4. Timescales**

- 4.1. Freedom of Information requests should be dealt with within 20 working days, excluding school holidays.

## **5. Delegated responsibilities**

- 5.1. Overall responsibility for ensuring that the Trust meets the statutory requirements of the FoIA, EIR and DPA lies with the Board of Trustees who have overall responsibility for information management issues. They have delegated the day-to-day responsibility of implementation to the Chief Executive Officer.

- 5.2. The Chief Executive Officer currently fulfils the role of 'Fol officer'.

6. All SGSAT staff are responsible for ensuring that they direct any requests for information made under the FoIA, EIR or DPA to [sgsacademytrust@sgscol.ac.uk](mailto:sgsacademytrust@sgscol.ac.uk)

## **7. Scope**

- 7.1. This policy applies to all recorded information held by the Trust that relates to the business of the Trust. This includes:
  - 7.1.1. Information created and held by the Trust
  - 7.1.2. Information created by the Trust and held by another organisation on its behalf
  - 7.1.3. Information held by the Trust provided by third parties, where this relates to a function or business of the Trust (such as contractual information) and
  - 7.1.4. Information held by the Trust relating to Trustees or Governors where the information relates to the functions or business of the Trust
- 7.2. This policy does not cover personal written communications (such as personal e-mails sent by staff). The Trust's Data Protection Policy establishes the standards regarding the use of "personal data" (as defined in the DPA).

## **8. Requesting information**

- 8.1. Procedures
  - 8.1.1. Requests for information under the acts will be directed to:  
[sgsacademytrust@sgscol.ac.uk](mailto:sgsacademytrust@sgscol.ac.uk)  
SGS Academy Trust  
Stratford Road  
Stroud  
Glos, GL5 4AH

8.1.2. The Trust has a duty under both the FoIA and EIR to provide advice and assistance to applicants making information requests. This includes assisting the applicant in making the application for information.

## 8.2. Charges

8.2.1. The Trust may charge a fee for complying with requests, as calculated in accordance with FoIA regulations. If a charge is to be made, the Trust will give written notice to the applicant before supplying the information requested.

8.2.2. The Trust will only charge for the cost of copying and transmitting information, not for time taken in reaching decisions regarding whether information is covered by an exemption.

8.2.3. Where the Trust estimates that the cost of locating the information will exceed the statutory threshold of £450, it will consider whether or not to comply with the request. The Trust is not obliged to comply with such a request but may choose to do so.

## 8.3. Publication

8.3.1. Section 19 of the FoIA obliges the Trust to make information proactively available in the form of a “publication scheme”. This scheme will list categories, or “classes” of information that will routinely be made available without the need for a specific information request. The Trust will indicate in the scheme where it wishes to charge for providing particular categories of information. The scheme is published on the Trust’s website.

8.3.2. The Trust plans to review this scheme regularly. Whenever any information is provided in response to a recorded FoIA enquiry, the Trust will assess whether the information is suitable for wider publication. In general, there will be a presumption in favour of publishing such information on the Trust’s website.

## 8.4. Withholding Information

8.4.1. The Freedom of Information Act contains 23 exemptions whereby information can be withheld. There are two categories; absolute and non-absolute. The Trust will only withhold information if it falls within the scope of one or more of these exemptions.

8.4.2. Where an absolute exemption applies, the Trust can automatically withhold the information. However, where the exemption is non-absolute the information can only be withheld where the Trust decides that the public interest is best served by withholding the information. Certain exemptions also contain a “prejudice test”, which means that the exemption can only be claimed if disclosing the information would prejudice the interest protected by the exemption.

- 8.4.3. The Trust will only withhold information covered by the exemption. Complete files or documents will not be withheld just because part of the information is covered by an exemption.
- 8.4.4. The Trust will only apply an exemption where it has reason to believe that prejudice might occur to the interest protected by the exemption. In addition, wherever a “public interest” exemption is being considered, the Trust will only withhold that information which it can demonstrate that the public interest will be best served by withholding. When considering withholding information under a non-absolute exemption the Trust will take into account whether the release of the information would:
  - 8.4.4.1. promote further understanding of current issues of public debate;
  - 8.4.4.2. promote the accountability of decisions taken by the Trust and the spending and allocation of public money;
  - 8.4.4.3. bring to light matters of public safety;
  - 8.4.4.4. allows the public to understand and challenge decisions made by the Trust;
  - 8.4.4.5. be otherwise in the public interest.
- 8.4.5. Where information is withheld under an exemption, in most cases the reason behind the decision will be made clear to the applicant, citing the exemption under which the information is being withheld. The applicant will also be given details of the right to challenge the decision through the Trust’s Board of Trustees (via the Clerk to the Board) and the right of appeal to the Information Commissioner’s Office.
- 8.4.6. Where a staff member plans to apply an exemption, he/she will consider whether other Trusts or schools hold similar information. If this is considered likely, he/she may contact the relevant Trust(s) or school(s) to ensure that a consistent response is provided to the applicant.
- 8.4.7. The Trust will also refuse to supply information under the FoIA, where the request is considered “vexatious” or “repeated” and under the EIR, where the request is considered ‘manifestly unreasonable’.

## **9. Releasing a third party’s information**

- 9.1. Where, in response to a request, information belonging to a third party (either an individual or other organisation) has to be considered for release, the staff member that received the request will seek input from the FoI officer prior to the release of the information.
- 9.2. The release of third party information will be considered carefully to prevent actions for breach of confidence or, in the case of living

individuals, breaches of the DPA. Both the EIR and FoIA permit information to be withheld when its release would breach the provisions of the DPA.

- 9.3. When the requested information relates to a living individual and amounts to “personal data” as defined in the DPA, its disclosure could breach the DPA. Therefore the release of third party personal information relating to living individuals will be considered in accordance with the data protection principles and, in particular, the “third party” provisions of the DPA.
- 9.4. Where appropriate, the Trust will contact the individual to ask for permission to disclose the information. If consent is not obtained, either because it was not considered appropriate to approach the third party or the third party could not be contacted or consent is refused. The Trust will then consider if it is reasonable to disclose the information, taking into account:
  - 9.4.1. any duty of confidentiality owed to the third party
  - 9.4.2. the steps taken to seek consent
  - 9.4.3. whether the third party is able to give consent and
  - 9.4.4. any express refusal of consent
- 9.5. The decision to disclose third party information will also take into account the impact of disclosure on the third party, relative to the impact on the applicant of withholding the information. Where the third party has been acting in an official, rather than private capacity, the Trust will be minded to disclose the information, although decisions will be made on a case by case basis.
- 9.6. Where the information relates to a staff member, the provisions of the DPA will still apply in many circumstances but the nature of the information will influence the Trust’s decision whether to release the information. Where the information relates to a matter clearly private to the individual, e.g. a disciplinary hearing, the information will almost certainly be withheld. However, where the information relates to the member of staff acting in their official capacity, e.g. an expenses claim, the information will normally be released. The exemption relating to the release of a third party’s personal data will not be used to withhold information about administrative decisions taken by the Trust.
- 9.7. As the DPA only relates to living individuals, the exemption relating to Data Protection under both the EIR and FoIA will not apply to information held about the deceased. Where the request might be controversial, the staff member will seek input from the FoI officer who will take advice from the Governing Body where necessary.
- 9.8. Where the third party is an organisation, rather than an individual, the provisions of DPA 1998 will not apply. The Trust will consider consulting the third party concerning the release of their information where:

- 9.8.1. the views of the third party may assist the Trust to decide whether an exemption under the Act applies to the information and
  - 9.8.2. in the event of the public interest test being applied, where the views of the third party may assist the Trust to make a decision relating to where the public interest lies
- 9.9. Consultation will not be undertaken where:
- 9.9.1. the Trust will not be disclosing the information due to some valid reason under the Act
  - 9.9.2. the Trust is satisfied that no exemption applies to the information and therefore cannot be withheld and
  - 9.9.3. the views of the third party will have no effect on the decision e.g. where there is other legislation preventing disclosure
- 9.10. Where input from a third party is required, the response time for the request remains the same. Therefore it will be made clear to the third party at the outset that they have a limited time for their views to be provided and that where responses are not immediate, the decision to disclose may have to be made without their input in order for the Trust to comply with the statutory time limits dictated by the legislation.
- 9.11. The Trust will endeavour to inform individuals and organisations submitting information that the information might be released following an information request and, where appropriate, will provide the supplier of the information opportunity to request confidentiality or supply reasons as to why the information should be treated confidentially.

## **10. Information held within contracts with the Trust**

- 10.1. Any contractual information, or information obtained from organisations during the tendering process, held by the Trust are subject to the provisions of the FoIA and EIR. Whenever the Trust enters into contracts, it will seek to exclude contractual terms forbidding the disclosure of information beyond the restrictions contained in the legislation. A standard form of wording will be included in contracts to cover the impact of FoIA and EIR in relation to the provision of information held in contracts.
- 10.2. The Trust can withhold contractual information where its disclosure under either the FoIA or EIR could be treated as actionable breach of confidence. Where the Trust intends to include non-disclosure provisions in a contract, it will agree with the contractor a schedule of the contract that clearly states which information should not be disclosed.
- 10.3. The Trust will only agree to enter into confidentiality clauses where the information is confidential in nature and that it is confident that the decision to restrict access to the information could be justified to the Information Commissioner.

- 10.4. Where information is not covered by the exemption relating to information accepted in confidence, a further exemption specifically under FoIA may be relevant, relating to commercial interests. This exemption is subject to a “public interest” test. Whenever the Trust has to consider the release of such information, it will contact the relevant organisation to obtain its opinions on the release of the information and any exemptions they may think relevant. However, the Trust will make the final decision relating to the disclosure of the information.
- 10.5. The Trust can also withhold information contained in contracts where any of the other exemptions listed in the FoIA or EIR are appropriate, although information will only be withheld in line with the Trust’s policy on the use of exemptions. All future contracts should contain a clause obliging contractors to co-operate fully and in a timely manner where assistance is requested in responding to an FoIA or EIR request.

## **11. Complaints procedure**

- 11.1. Whenever the Trust withholds information under an exemption, or for any other reason, it will inform the applicant of their right to complain about the decision through the Trust’s complaints procedure and of the right of appeal to the Information Commissioner. Any complaint received will be dealt with in accordance with the Trust’s complaints procedure as detailed in its Complaints Policy. If the result of the complaints is that any decision to withhold information be overturned, this information will be supplied as soon as it is possible.

## **12. Illegal actions**

- 12.1. It is a criminal offence under any of the three information regimes for members of staff to alter, deface or remove any record (including e-mails) following receipt of an information request. Both the FoIA and EIR contain specific provisions to make such action a criminal offence.