



Whistle Blowing Policy

The Background

The Staff Code of Conduct makes clear that employees should report immediately with a written report any impropriety or breach of procedure that they encounter while at work. However, the Code of Conduct does not give a detailed framework for what is now commonly termed “whistle blowing” by employees.

This procedure takes into account the requirements of the law, specifically the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. The Act gives employees two safeguards in respect of disclosures of information. Firstly, an employee is entitled not to be subjected to any detriment by virtue of having made a protected disclosure.

Secondly, if an employee is dismissed because of having made such a disclosure, the dismissal will automatically be unfair, and further, there will be no need for the employee to have the required continuous employment before bringing a claim for unfair dismissal.

1. Introduction

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the workplace. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the company. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances it may be easier to ignore the concern rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.

The Managing Directors are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees who have serious concerns about any aspect of the company's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.

This Code makes it clear that you can do so without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. This confidential reporting policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns within the company rather than overlooking a problem or ‘blowing the whistle’ outside.

The policy applies to all employees.

2. Aims and scope of this policy

This policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken

- ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied
- reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in good faith.

There are existing procedures in place to enable you to lodge a grievance relating to your own employment. The confidential reporting policy is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. These include:

- conduct, which is an offence or a breach of law
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
- damage to the environment
- possible fraud and corruption
- sexual or physical abuse, or
- other unethical conduct.

Thus, any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of employees or others acting on behalf of the company can be reported under the confidential reporting policy. This may be about something that:

- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the school subscribes to;
- is against the school's standing orders, financial regulations, contracts code, or other policies;
- falls below established standards of practice;
- amounts to improper conduct

3. Safeguards - Harassment or victimisation

The Company is committed to good practice and high standards and want to be supportive of employees.

The Company recognise that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.

The Company will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.

Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect you.

4. Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may need to come forward as a witness.

5. Anonymous Allegations

This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but will be considered at the discretion of the Directors.

In exercising this discretion the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

6. Untrue allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If however, you make an allegation which can be shown to have been made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

7. How to raise a concern

As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your Case manager or the Director.

Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Staff who wish to make a written report are invited to use the following format:

- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates);
- the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.

The earlier you express the concern the easier it is to take action. Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for your concern.

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns.

8. How your concerns will be dealt with

Your concerns will receive a response from the Directors. Do not forget that testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the Directors will write to you:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how the matter will be dealt with
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made
- supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms, and
- telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the individuals considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought from you.

Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a union or professional association representative or a friend.

The Directors will take steps to minimise any difficulties that you may experience as a result of raising a concern. If you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the board will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure. The Directors accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, you will be informed of the outcome of any investigation.

9. The responsible officer

The Directors has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. The Director maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcomes (but in a form which does not endanger your confidentiality).

How the matter can be taken further

This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within Prime Tutors to raise concerns.