

ACE – Whistleblowing Policy

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Who should use this policy?

All staff at one time or another, have concerns about what is happening at work. More often than not, these concerns are relatively minor and can be easily resolved. Openness, probity and accountability are vital components of our Trust. Employees who discover lapses in these areas must be encouraged to come forward and disclose their concerns to someone who can be trusted to take action. This process is known as 'Whistleblowing'. These issues will be taken seriously and treated in a confidential manner.

This policy will be reviewed every two years by the Strategic Board .

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1. Introduction

The Academy for Character and Excellence is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, staff, governors, directors and others that we deal with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Academy are encouraged to voice those concerns.

Staff and governors at the Academy are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the Academy. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Academy. 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. This document makes it clear that concerns may be reported without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage.

This Whistleblowing Procedure is intended to encourage and enable staff and governors to raise serious concerns within the Academy rather than overlooking a problem or raising the matter externally.

The procedure applies to all staff, governors, volunteers and those contractors working for the Academy. It also covers suppliers and those providing services to the Academy.

There are existing procedures within the Academy to enable individuals to lodge a grievance or a complaint. The Whistleblowing Procedure is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures.

These include:

- possible fraud and corruption
- the unauthorised use of Academy funds
- failure to comply with Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
- failure to comply with Codes of Practice
- conduct which is a criminal offence
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- health and safety risks, including risks to students, the public as well as other colleagues
- damage to the environment
- breach of a legal obligation

2. Definition

Whistleblowing inside the work place is the reporting by workers or ex-workers, of wrong doing such as fraud, malpractice, mismanagement, breach of health and safety law or any other illegal or unethical act either on the part of management, the Academy Trust or by fellow employees. Workers may include, for example, contractors and agency workers.

There is a balance to be struck between the right of the individual member of staff to speak freely on a range of matters and the right of the Academy or colleagues to protect themselves against false and malicious accusations. A whistle blowing procedure is about the ways in which concerns about malpractice may properly be raised within the Academy and if necessary outside the Academy.

3. Legislation

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 is designed to protect 'whistle blowers' from detriment and unfair dismissal. The people protected by the Act include workers, employees, third party contractor staff, agency workers and work experience providers.

4. Objectives/Principles Supporting the Procedure

1. Create an ethical, open culture:
 - Write, publish and communicate a code of conduct and ethics.
2. Establish safe routes for communications of concerns:
 - Appoint individuals or a group outside the normal line management to receive complaints of irregularities or other concerns.
3. Protect the whistle blower:
 - Make it clear that the Academy will support and not discriminate against concerned employees provided any claim is made in good faith.
4. Establish a fair and impartial investigative procedure:
 - Make sure that the Academy responds to the concern by focusing on the problem, rather than denigrating the messenger.

5. Remind staff of the duty of confidentiality:
 - The duty of fidelity is implied by the law in every contract of employment and prohibits employees from publicly disclosing employers' confidential information, unless it is in the public interest that information is disclosed or unless the Academy fails to properly consider or deal with the issue.
6. Safeguard against abuse of the procedure:
 - Ensure that the malicious raising of unfounded allegations is recognised as a disciplinary offence.
7. Uphold the right to disclose a concern:
 - The individual member of staff has the right to disclose a concern/issue if the Academy does not deal with the matter.
8. Involve directors, governors (portfolio holders) and staff in developing the procedure:
 - To be effective there should be a sense of organisational ownership of a whistle blowing procedure.
9. Review:
 - Ensure there is a review mechanism using the comments and experience of those who may have had reason to invoke the whistle blowing procedure.

5. The Procedure

All parties need to agree that the issue raised will be kept confidential while the procedure is being used.

The Complainant (the person raising the concern) should:

- i. Raise their concern with their line manager or the Executive Principal. This may be done orally or in writing. The complainant has the right to have the matter treated confidentially.
- ii. If the line manager believes the concern to be genuine and that it is appropriate to use the Whistle Blowing procedure, the manager should contact the Clerk to the Academy Trust (the Assessor).
- iii. Should it be alleged that the Clerk to the Academy Trust is involved in the alleged malpractice, a senior manager should be contacted to act as Assessor.

- iv. If the complainant feels unable to raise their concern with their line manager or the Executive Principal in the first instance, they may contact the Assessor direct. If this occurs the complainant will be asked to justify why they feel unable to raise the concern with their line manager or the Executive Principal.

The Assessor should:

- i. Interview the complainant within seven working days, in confidence, or earlier if there is an immediate danger to loss of life or serious injury;
- ii. Obtain as much information as possible from the complainant about the grounds for the belief of malpractice;
- iii. Consult with the complainant about further steps which could be taken;
- iv. Advise the complainant of the appropriate route if the matter does not fall under the Academy's Whistle blowing Procedure;
- v. Report all matters raised under this procedure to the Academy Trust's Responsible Officer.

At the interview with the Assessor, the complainant may be accompanied by a recognised trade union representative or a work colleague. The Assessor may be accompanied by a member of the Academy staff to take notes, who may also be a governance clerk. The Assessor may also want to have the assistance of HR and if this is the case they should contact them prior to the meeting.

Within ten working days of the interview, the Assessor will recommend to the CEO one or more of the following:

- i. the matter be investigated internally by the Academy;
- ii. the matter be investigated by the external auditors appointed by the Academy;
- iii. the matter be reported to the Department for Education
- iv. the matter be reported to the Police;
- v. the route for the member of staff to pursue the matter if it does not fall within this procedure; or
- vi. that no further action is taken by the Academy.

The grounds on which no further action is taken include:

- i. the Assessor is satisfied that, on the balance of probabilities, there is no evidence that malpractice within the meaning of this procedure has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur;

- ii. the Assessor is satisfied that the complainant is not acting in good faith;
- iii. the matter is already (or has been) the subject of proceedings under one of the Academy's other procedures or policies;
- iv. the matter concerned is already the subject of legal proceedings, or has already been referred to the Police, the external auditors, the Department for Education or other public authority.

Should it be alleged that the CEO is involved in the alleged malpractice; the Assessor's recommendation will be made to the Chair of the Strategic Board of the Academy Trust.

The recipient of the recommendation (CEO or Responsible Officer) will ensure that it is implemented unless there is good reason for not doing so in whole or in part. Such a reason will be reported to the next Strategic Board meeting of the Academy Trust.

The complainant's identity will be kept confidential unless the complainant otherwise consents or unless there are grounds to believe that the complainant has acted maliciously.

In the absence of such consent or grounds, the Assessor will not reveal the identity of the complainant except:

- i. where the Assessor is under a legal obligation to do so;
- ii. where the information is already in the public domain;
- iii. on a strictly confidential basis to a professionally qualified lawyer for the purpose of obtaining legal advice;
- iv. where it is essential that the complainant provides evidence at a disciplinary hearing or other proceedings.

The conclusion of any agreed investigation will be reported by the Assessor to the complainant within twenty-eight days.

All responses to the complainant will be made in writing and sent to the complainant's home address sent by recorded delivery and/or by email should the complainant agree.

If the complainant has not had a response within the above time limits, they may appeal to the Academy's external auditors, but will inform the Assessor before doing so.

The complainant may at any time disclose the matter on a confidential basis to a professionally qualified lawyer for the purpose of taking legal advice.

The Academy will ensure the complainant is protected from any form of victimisation or discrimination.

6. Malicious Accusations

If an allegation is made in good faith, but it is not substantiated, no disciplinary action will be taken against the person raising the concern. If, however, an allegation is made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain by an employee, the Academy may investigate this under the Disciplinary Procedure which may result in their dismissal. In the event of a false or malicious allegation being made, the subject of the complaint will have legal remedies available.

7. External Sources

Whistle blowing to an external source without first going through the internal procedure is inadvisable without compelling reasons. A reason may be that the complainant is not content with the conclusion of the Assessor. In particular, approaches to the media without having gone through these procedures may be considered evidence of bad faith. Compelling reasons could be the involvement of the senior managers, serious health and safety issues, serious safeguarding issues or possible discrimination. The external sources which could be used are:

- i. Department for Education
- ii. Member of Parliament
- iii. National Audit Office iv Health and Safety Executive.
- iv. Police
- v. Trade union
- vi. Local Citizens Advice Bureau
- vii. Relevant professional body or regulatory organisation
- viii. HM Revenue & Customs
- ix. The Environment Agency.

If the matter is taken outside the Academy, individuals should ensure that they do not disclose confidential information.