

PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE
(commonly known as Whistleblowing)
POLICY AND PROCEDURE

June 2020

Approved by Governing Body on: 9th July 2020
Endorsed by Audit Committee on: 24th June 2020
Reviewed by SMT on: 10th June 2020
Next review (as above): Summer 2023



A POLICY

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The College is committed to operating in an ethical and principled way in keeping with its stated value of 'setting high standards and living up to them'. It seeks to create an open and supportive structure in which all work together to earn and maintain its reputation in 'educating for excellence'. There is a culture of self-evaluation and reflective practice across the whole college which encourages improvement.

2 Legislative framework

- 2.1 Whistleblowing law is located in the Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998). The principles of openness and accountability which underpin legislation protecting whistleblowers are reflected in this policy and procedure. The College is also committed to ensuring compliance with the Bribery Act 2010.

3 Aims

- 3.1 The aim of this policy and procedure is to provide employees and workers (referred to collectively as 'workers' in this policy – see also paragraph 3) with a means for raising genuine concerns of suspected bribery, breaches of the law and other serious wrongdoings.
- 3.2 The College encourages workers to raise genuine concerns about suspected wrongdoing at the earliest practicable stage. This policy and procedure is intended to provide safeguards to enable members of staff to raise concerns about malpractice in connection with the College including assurance that disclosures will be dealt with consistently and fairly.
- 3.3 This policy and procedure also aims to encourage workers to raise genuine concerns through internal College procedures without fear of adverse repercussions against them. The law allows workers to raise such concerns externally and this policy informs workers how they can do so. However, a failure to raise a concern under this procedure may result in a disclosure losing its protected status under the law.
- 3.4 This policy and procedure also seeks to balance the need to allow a culture of openness against the need to protect other workers against vexatious allegations or allegations which are not well-founded.

4. Scope of this policy and procedure

- 4.1 Applicability: This policy applies to all employees of the College, including:
- Apprentices;
 - Workers which includes any casual workers; home-based casual workers;
 - Employees of subcontractors;
 - Agency workers.
- 4.2 Workers might be unsure whether it is appropriate to raise their concern under this policy and procedure or whether it is a personal grievance, which is more appropriate to raise under the College's grievance policy and procedure (see Staff Conflict Resolution Policy). Any worker in this situation is encouraged to approach the Vice Principal (Curriculum), Deputy Principal or Clerk to the Governing Body in confidence for advice.

4.3 Specific Subject Matter

If, in the course of employment, a worker becomes aware of information which they reasonably believe tends to show one or more of the following, they must use this policy and procedure:

- That a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed;
- That an individual has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject;
- That a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur;
- That the health or safety of any individual has been, is being, or is likely to be, endangered;
- That the environment, has been, is being, or is likely to be, damaged;
- That information tending to show any of the above, is being, or is likely to be, deliberately concealed.

4.4 **Students** at the College are also encouraged to raise genuine concerns about suspected wrongdoing by making a complaint to their tutor, or, if this is not appropriate, to the Vice Principal (Curriculum or Deputy Principal. This policy and procedure, however, is designed for the use of workers of the College.

4.5 **A governor** would raise any such concerns with the Clerk to the Governing Body, or if he/she were the cause of the concern, with the Chair of the Governing Body.

5 Definitions : Protected disclosures

5.1 The law protects workers who, out of a sense of public duty, want to reveal suspected wrongdoing or malpractice.

5.2 The law allows workers to raise what it defines as a 'protected disclosure'. In order to be a protected disclosure, a disclosure must relate to a specific subject matter (See Section 4.3 above) and the disclosure must also be made in an appropriate way (See Section 5). A 'protected disclosure' must, in the reasonable belief of the worker making it, also be made in the public interest. A protected disclosure must consist of information and not merely be allegations of suspected malpractice.

6 Responsibilities

6.1 Governors

The Governing Body has the overriding responsibility for the character and mission of the College and ensuring that the financial, planning and other management controls applied by the College are appropriate.

6.2 Management

The college management has responsibility for the communication and promotion of the policy and its principles within the College and the prevention, detection and investigation of irregularities and their timely resolution.

6.3 All staff

All 'workers' have a role to play in ensuring that the college is adequately protected from wrongdoing. They are expected to observe the highest standards in ensuring adherence to legal requirements, rules, procedures and practices. Staff are positively encouraged to raise any concerns they have that any wrongdoing might be taking place.

7 Monitoring

7.1 This policy will be reviewed on a three year cycle taking account of the latest guidance available such as that from the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415175/bis-15-200-whistleblowing-guidance-for-employers-and-code-of-practice.pdf.

- 7.2 The College will keep a record of all concerns raised under this policy and procedure (including cases where the College deems that there is no case to answer and therefore that no action should be taken) and will report to the Audit Committee and Governing Body on an annual basis or sooner as appropriate.

8 Related policies

Anti-Fraud and Irregularity Policy

Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

Equality and Diversity Policy

Health and Safety Policy

Employment policies including Change Management, Staff Disciplinary Policy etc.

Data Protection Policy

Freedom of Information: Publication Scheme

Environmental Policy

Instruments and Articles

B PROCEDURE

1 Procedure for making a disclosure

- 1.1 Information which a worker reasonably believes tends to show one or more of the situations given in A 4.3 should promptly be disclosed to their line manager so that any appropriate action can be taken.
- 1.2 If it is inappropriate to make such a disclosure to their line manager, a worker can raise the issue with the Vice Principal (Curriculum) or the Deputy Principal.
- 1.3 If the disclosure relates to the Principal, a worker can raise the issue with the Clerk to the Governing Body. In the event that the disclosure relates to the Clerk to the Governing Body, a worker can raise the issue with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- 1.4 Workers are encouraged to identify themselves when making a disclosure. If an anonymous disclosure is made, the College will not be in a position to notify the individual making the disclosure of the outcome of action taken by the College. Anonymity also means that the College will have difficulty in investigating such a concern. The College reserves the right to determine whether to apply this procedure in respect of an anonymised disclosure in light of the following considerations:
 - The seriousness of the issues raised in the disclosure;
 - The credibility of the concern; and
 - How likely it is that the concern can be confirmed from attributable sources.
- 1.5 For further guidance in relation to this policy and procedure, or concerning the use of the disclosure procedure generally, employees should speak in confidence to the Vice Principal (Curriculum), the Deputy Principal or the Clerk to the Governing Body.

2 Procedure for investigation of a disclosure

- 2.1 When a worker makes a disclosure, the College will acknowledge its receipt, in writing, within a reasonable time.
- 2.2 The College will then determine whether or not it believes that the disclosure has substance or merit. If the College considers that the disclosure does not have sufficient merit to warrant further action, the worker will be notified in writing of the reasons for the College's decision and advised that no further action will be taken by the College under this policy and procedure. Considerations to be taken into account when making this determination may include the following:
 - If the College is satisfied that a worker does not have a reasonable belief that suspected malpractice is occurring; or
 - If the matter is already the subject of legal proceedings or appropriate action by an external body; or
 - If the matter is already subject to another, appropriate College procedure.
- 2.3 When a worker makes a disclosure which has sufficient substance or merit warranting further action, the College will take action it deems appropriate (including action under any other applicable College policy or procedure). Possible actions could include internal investigation; referral to the College's auditors; or referral to relevant external bodies such as the police, Ofsted, Health and Safety Executive, funding bodies or the Information Commissioner's Office.

- 2.4 If appropriate, any internal investigation would be conducted by an appropriate manager without any direct association with the individual to whom the disclosure relates, or by an external investigator appointed by the College as appropriate.
- 2.5 Any recommendations for further action made by the College will be addressed to the Principal or Chair of the Governing Body as appropriate in the circumstances. The recipient will take all steps within their power to ensure the recommendations are implemented unless there are good reasons for not doing so.
- 2.6 The worker making the disclosure will be notified of the outcome of any action taken by the College under this policy and procedure within a reasonable period of time. If the worker is not satisfied that their concern has been appropriately addressed, they can appeal against the outcome by raising the issue with the Principal or Chair of the Governing Body as appropriate within 5 working days. The Principal or Chair of the Governing Body will make a final decision on action to be taken and notify the worker making the disclosure.
- 2.7 All communications with the worker making the disclosure will be in writing and sent to the worker's home address rather than through the College's internal mail. If investigations into the concern are prolonged, the College should keep the worker concerned updated as to the progress of the investigation and give an estimated timeframe for its conclusion.

3 Safeguards for workers making a disclosure

- 3.1 A worker making a disclosure under this procedure can expect their matter to be treated confidentially by the College and, where applicable, their name will not be disclosed to anyone implicated in the suspected wrongdoing, without their prior approval.
- 3.2 The College will take all reasonable steps to ensure that any report of recommendations, or other relevant documentation, produced by the College does not identify the worker making the disclosure without their written consent, or unless the College is legally obliged to do so, or for the purposes of seeking legal advice.
- 3.3 No formal disciplinary action will be taken against a worker on the grounds of making a disclosure made under this policy or procedure. This does not prevent the College from bringing disciplinary action against a worker where the College has grounds to believe that a disclosure was made maliciously or vexatiously, or where a disclosure is made outside the College without reasonable grounds.
- 3.4 A worker will not suffer dismissal or any detrimental action or omission of any type (including informal pressure or any form of victimisation) by the College for making a disclosure in accordance with this policy and procedure. Equally, where a worker is threatened, bullied, pressurised or victimised by a colleague for making a disclosure, disciplinary action will be taken by the College against the colleague in question.

4. Disclosure to external bodies

- 4.1 This policy and procedure has been implemented to allow workers to raise disclosures internally within the College. A worker has the right to make a disclosure outside of the College where there are reasonable grounds to do so and in accordance with the law.
- 4.2 Workers may make a disclosure to an appropriate external body prescribed by the law. This list of 'prescribed' organisations and bodies can be found in information on the GOV.UK website.
- 4.3 Workers can also make disclosures on a confidential basis to a practising solicitor or Barrister in the course of taking advice.

4.4 If a worker seeks advice outside of the College, they must be careful not to breach any confidentiality obligations or damage the College's reputation in so doing.

5. Accountability

5.1 The College will keep a record of all concerns raised under this policy and procedure (including cases where the College deems that there is no case to answer and therefore that no action should be taken) and will report to the Audit Committee and Governing Body on an annual basis (at the summer meeting) or sooner as appropriate.

6. Further assistance for workers

6.1 The College will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of workers who make disclosures. If, at any stage of this procedure a worker feels that they are being subject to informal pressures, bullying or harassment due to making a disclosure, they should raise this matter, in writing, to the Principal or Clerk to the Governing Body.

6.2 A worker making a disclosure may want to confidentially request counselling or other support from the College's occupational health service. Any such request for counselling or support services should be addressed to the Vice Principal (Curriculum). Such a request would be made in confidence.

6.3 Workers can also contact the charity Public Concern at Work for confidential advice on whistleblowing issues. Contact details are as follows:

3rd Floor, Bank Chambers
6 - 10 Borough High Street
London SE1 9QQ

Whistleblowing Advice Line: 020 7404 6609
<http://www.pcaw.org.uk>

Lead: NCW