



# Whistleblowing Policy

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September 2025

Reviewed by Executive Team:	August 2025
Endorsed by [committee]:	Audit & Risk – after first draft
Approved by Board:	1 September 2025
Next review	Summer 2026

## A – Policy

### 1. Introduction

HLA is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability in keeping with its Values. In line with this commitment, we expect our staff, and anyone associated with the Trust and its college and schools who has concerns about any aspects of our practices to be able to voice these concerns without fear of reprisal.

### 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.
- 2.2. HLA is also committed to ensuring compliance with the Bribery Act 2010.
- 2.3. The requirement to have clear whistleblowing procedures in place is set out in the Academy Trust Handbook.
- 2.4. This policy has been written in line with the above document, as well as [government guidance on whistleblowing](#).
- 2.5. This policy complies with HLA's funding agreement and Articles of Association.

### 3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to all employees of the Trust, including:

- Workers which includes any casual workers; home-based casual workers
- Employees of subcontractors
- Agency workers, Volunteers
- Apprentices
- Members, Trustees and Local Governors

3.2 The DfE have stated the difference between [whistleblowing and raising a grievance](#). Whistleblowing is where there is a concern about a danger or illegality that has a public interest aspect to it (e.g. because it threatens students, third parties or the public generally). A grievance is specific to a worker's employment position such as resolving a personal dispute in the workplace; complaints of this nature should follow the Grievance Policy.

3.3 A Member, Trustee or Governor can raise any concerns with the Director of Governance or if they were the cause of concern with the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

### 4. Definitions

Whistleblowing covers concerns made that report wrongdoing that is "in the public interest". Examples of whistleblowing include (but are not limited to):

- Criminal offences, such as fraud or corruption
- Students' or staff health and safety being put in danger
- Failure to comply with a legal obligation or statutory requirement
- Breaches of financial management procedures
- Attempts to cover up the above, or any other wrongdoing in the public interest
- Damage to the environment

A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to the above.

## 5. Aims

- 5.1. The aim of this policy and procedure is to provide employees and workers and anyone in scope of this policy (referred to collectively as 'workers' in this policy) with a means for raising genuine concerns of suspected bribery, breaches of the law and other serious wrongdoings.
- 5.2. HLA 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 Trust including assurance that disclosures will be dealt with consistently and fairly.
- 5.3. This policy and procedure also aims to encourage workers to raise genuine concerns through internal 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.
- 5.4. 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.

## 6. Responsibilities

### 6.1. The Trust Board

The Board has the overriding responsibility for the Trust and ensuring that the financial, planning and other management controls applied by the Trust and college and schools within the Trust are appropriate.

### 6.2. Management

The Executive Team and leadership teams have responsibility for the communication and promotion of the policy and its principles within the Trust and the prevention, detection and investigation of irregularities and their timely resolution.

### 6.3 Staff

All 'workers' have a role to play in ensuring that the Trust 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

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

This policy will be reviewed annually in the first instance and thereafter every 3 years by the HLA Board subject to legislative requirements.

## 8. Related Documentation

This policy links to the following policies and procedures:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection policies and procedures
- Complaints policy
- Staff Grievance
- Anti-Fraud & Irregularity (Bribery)

HLA Director of Governance

### B – Procedure

#### 1. Procedure for making a disclosure and confidentiality

- 1.1 Information which a worker reasonably believes tends to show one or more of the situations given in section A.4 should promptly be disclosed to their line manager so that any appropriate action can be taken. In most instances the information should be shared with the worker's line manager. If it is inappropriate to make such a disclosure to their line manager, a worker can raise the issue with the most appropriate member of the respective leadership team.
- 1.2 If the disclosure relates to the CEO, a worker can raise the issue with the Director of Governance. In the event that the disclosure relates to the Director of Governance, a worker can raise the issue with the Chair of the Board of Trustees.
- 1.3 Where a disclosure about staff conduct is related to a potential safeguarding issue or may raise a low level concern, the information should be shared with the relevant Designated Safeguarding Lead and policies which allow for raising concerns including low level concerns. Where a staff member feels unable to raise a concern about safeguarding with the Trust as their employer or feels that their genuine concerns are not being addressed, other whistleblowing channels are open to them. They can make a referral to the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) who provide information online [here](#). General advice on whistleblowing can be found via: Advice on Whistleblowing or via the NSPCC (see section 4). The NSPCC's [Whistleblowing Advice Line](#) is available as an alternative route for staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally, or have concerns about the way an issue is being handled by the Trust.
- 1.4 Workers are encouraged to identify themselves when making a disclosure. If an anonymous disclosure is made, the Trust may not be able to take the claim further where they do not have all the information they need and will not be in a position to notify the individual making the disclosure of the outcome of action taken by the Trust. The Trust reserves the right to determine whether to apply this procedure in respect of an anonymised disclosure and will make the following considerations:
  - The seriousness of the issues raised in the disclosure
  - The credibility of the concern
  - How likely it is that the concern can be confirmed from attributable sources

It is possible when making a disclosure to request confidentiality, and the Trust shall make every effort to protect the identity of individuals in these circumstances (see section 3).

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 Director of HR or the Director of Governance.

1.6 The Trust will keep a central record of disclosures made under the Whistleblowing Policy and will comply with data protection requirements in terms of any records made and kept.

## 2. Procedure for investigation of a disclosure

2.1 The Trust will acknowledge receipt of a disclosure, in writing, within 5 working days.

2.2 The Trust will then determine whether or not it believes that the disclosure has substance or merit. If the Trust 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 Trust's decision and advised that no further action will be taken by the Trust under this policy and procedure. Considerations to be taken into account when making this determination may include the following:

- If the Trust is satisfied that a worker does not have a reasonable belief that suspected malpractice is occurring
- If the matter is already the subject of legal proceedings or appropriate action by an external body
- If the matter is already subject to another, appropriate procedure

2.3 When a worker makes a disclosure which has sufficient substance or merit warranting further action, the Trust will take action it deems appropriate (including action under any other applicable policy or procedure). Possible actions could include internal investigation; referral to the Trust'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 Trust as appropriate.

2.5 Any recommendations for further action made by the Trust will be addressed to the CEO or Chair of the Board of Trustees 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 Trust 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 CEO or Chair of the Board of Trustees as appropriate within 5 working days. They 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 Trust's internal mail. If investigations into the concern are prolonged, the Trust 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 Workers making a disclosure under this procedure can expect their matter to be treated confidentially by the Trust and, where applicable, their name will not be disclosed to anyone implicated in the suspected wrongdoing, without their prior approval.

3.2 The Trust will take all reasonable steps to ensure that any report of recommendations, or other relevant documentation, produced by the Trust does not identify the worker making the disclosure without their written consent, or unless the Trust 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 Trust from bringing disciplinary action against a worker where the Trust has grounds to believe that a disclosure was made maliciously or vexatiously, or where a disclosure is made outside the Trust 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 Trust 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 Trust against the colleague in question.

### 4. Disclosure to external bodies (exceptional cases)

4.1 This policy and procedure has been implemented to allow workers to raise disclosures internally within the Trust. A worker has the right to make a disclosure outside of the Trust 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 is available from Protect (formerly known as Public Concern at Work).

4.3 Further information and contacts can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2/whistleblowing-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies>

4.4 We encourage any individual to seek appropriate advice before reporting a concern to anyone externally. If a worker seeks advice outside of the Trust, they must be careful not to breach any confidentiality obligations or damage the Trust's reputation in so doing, Protect is a leading independent charity providing information and advice and a confidential hotline (see section 5).

Name of regulator	Contact details
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills	<p>The Chief Inspector Ofsted Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD</p> <p>Tel: 0300 123 3155 Email: <a href="mailto:whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk">whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk</a></p>
Secretary of State for Education/Department for Education	<p>Ministerial and Public Communications Division Department for Education Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD</p> <p>Tel: 0370 000 2288 Website: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe">www.gov.uk/contact-dfe</a></p>
The Health and Safety Executive	<p>Tel: 0300 003 1647 Online form: <a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm">www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm</a></p>

## 5. Further assistance for workers

- 5.1 The Trust 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 CEO or Director of Governance.
- 5.2 A worker making a disclosure may want to confidentially request counselling or other support from the Trust's occupational health service. Any such request for counselling or support services should be addressed to HR. Such a request would be made in confidence.
- 5.3 Protect (formerly known as Public Concern at Work) is a source of further information and advice at [Protect - Speak up stop harm - Whistleblowing Homepage](http://www.protect.org.uk). It also provides a free helpline offering confidential advice on 020 3117 2520.

## 6. Malicious or vexatious allegations

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns when they believe there to potentially be an issue. If an allegation is made in good faith, but the investigation finds no wrongdoing, there will be no disciplinary action against the member of staff who raised the concern. If, however, an allegation is shown to be deliberately invented or malicious, the Trust will consider whether any disciplinary action is appropriate against the person making the allegation.