

# Whistle-blowing Policy and Procedure

<b>Date established:</b>	May 2003
<b>Updated:</b>	April 2024
<b>Reviewed:</b>	Annually
<b>Purpose:</b>	This policy and procedure aims to set out MITSkills position regarding the disclosure of concerns about serious malpractice without recrimination

## 1 Introduction

The term "whistleblowing" has no legal definition within UK law. However, it has been used to describe incidents where workers publicly disclose some alleged wrongdoing within an organisation.

This procedure refers to workers. This is because the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 applies to a wider group of individuals than just employees. It also applies to casual workers, certain agency workers, and third-party contractors whose work is controlled by the company and those working under training contracts.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 aims to promote greater openness in the workplace and, by amending the Employment Rights Act 1996, protects "whistle-blowers" from detrimental treatment, i.e., victimisation or dismissal, for raising concerns about matters in the public interest.

This statement sets out the company's policy and provides, in some detail, advice and guidance to all workers on the scope of the policy. It explains that any worker, who has a reasonable belief that there is serious malpractice relating to any of the protected matters specified in the policy, may raise a concern under the procedure set out below, without fear of reprisals.

There is also information about the rights to raise the matter externally if those that make disclosures are not satisfied with the company's response and the protection afforded to them.

The company will investigate and deal properly and sensitively with any allegations of wrongdoing raised. The company encourages all workers to raise matters of concern responsibly through the procedures laid down in this policy.

The ESFA has required the following is added to the Feedback and Complaints Policy and Procedure of all training providers.

"The Training Provider's Feedback and Complaints Procedure Add Clause as follows:

The Training Provider will ensure that it has in place and complies with an effective whistleblowing procedure, approved by the body responsible for the management of the Training Provider, whereby staff may raise in confidence concerns about possible malpractice without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination, or disadvantage. The procedure must be published on the Training Provider's public-facing website. The Training Provider will regularly review the procedure, including securing approval from the body responsible for the management of the Training Provider of any amended procedure."

MITSkills notes that we have a separate complaints procedure and policy this must be read separately and covers this contract point along with this document; both will be published on our website.

## **2 Scope of the Policy**

If you genuinely believe that the company or any worker of the company has taken, is intending to, or has failed to act which you reasonably believe will lead or amount to:

- A criminal offence.
- Failure to comply with legal obligations of the company.
- Financial or non-financial maladministration or malpractice or impropriety or fraud.
- Academic or professional malpractice.
- A risk to the health or safety of any individual.
- Environmental damage.
- A miscarriage of justice.
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour; and
- Attempts to suppress or conceal any information relating to any of the above.

You can disclose this information orally or in writing to the person or organisation set out below. If you make such a disclosure, you should provide full details and, where possible, supporting evidence.

## **3 Who can raise a concern?**

Any worker, who has a reasonable and genuine belief that there is serious malpractice relating to any of the protected matters specified in Section 2 above, may raise a concern under the procedure detailed below.

It is important that the issues set out in Section 2 above, are dealt with sensitively and quickly. Anonymous disclosures are strongly discouraged as they are likely to hinder effective investigation. However, if you disclose information in accordance with this procedure, in so far as is reasonably practicable, your identity will be kept confidential.

The company will promptly investigate your allegation and will take whatever action it considers appropriate. Your assistance may be required during the investigation. Your allegation will be addressed seriously, and you will be informed of the outcome of the investigation as soon as is practicable.

If you reasonably believe that the nature of your concern relates to any of the areas set out in Section 2 above and you disclose this information to the appropriate person under this procedure in good faith, no action will be taken against you for making the disclosure.

The company will take appropriate action against any worker:

- Found to be victimising another worker for using this procedure, or deterring any worker from reporting genuine concerns under it, or
- Making a disclosure/allegation maliciously, or where there were no reasonable grounds for believing that the information supplied was accurate.

For those people employed directly by the company there may be disciplinary action, which may result in dismissal.

#### **4 Procedure**

Normally any disclosure about a protected matter should be made in the first instance to:

##### Your Line Manager or HR

The person to whom the disclosure is made will decide whether the matter should be dealt with under this procedure. If she/he considers that the matter should be dealt with under a different procedure, she/he will advise you as to the appropriate steps to be taken.

#### **5 Process**

The person to whom the disclosure is made will normally consider the information and decide whether there is a prima facie case to answer. She/he will decide whether an investigation should be conducted and what form it should take. This will depend on the nature of the matter raised and may be:

- Investigated internally.
- Referred to the External Auditors.
- The subject of independent enquiry.

Some matters, following investigation, will need to be referred to the relevant outside body, e.g., the Police or Funding Body etc. If the person to whom the disclosure is made decides not to proceed with an investigation, the decision will be explained to you, as fully as possible. It is then open to you to make the disclosure again to another of the persons specified in Section 4 above.

#### **6 Investigation**

Any investigation will be conducted as sensitively and speedily as possible. You will be notified of the intended timetable for the investigation. The person to whom the disclosure is made may authorise an initial investigation to establish the relevant facts. The investigation may be conducted by an internal auditor in the case of a financial irregularity, or by another person.

The investigator will report his/her findings to the person to whom the disclosure was made, as soon as is reasonably practicable, who will then decide if there is a case to answer and what procedure to follow. This may include taking steps with the competent authority to set up a special internal independent investigation or reference to some external authority, such as the police, for further investigation.

#### **7 Records**

An official written record will be kept of each stage of the procedure.

#### **8 Reporting of outcomes**

The persons deciding on the issues will make a report of all disclosures and subsequent actions taken. This record should be signed and dated by you and the Investigating Officer.

Where appropriate, the formal record need not identify the person making the disclosure, but in that case, you will be required to sign a document confirming that the complaint has been investigated.

Such reports will normally be retained for at least five years.

## **9 Advice for staff raising a concern.**

The Company acknowledges the difficult choice you may have to make in raising a concern.

The following advice is recommended if any worker wishes to make a disclosure:

- Make any objections to illegal, unsafe, or unethical practices promptly to avoid any misinterpretation of the motives for doing so.
- Focus on the issues and proceed in a tactful manner to avoid unnecessary personal antagonism which might distract attention from solving the problem; and
- Be accurate in his/her observations and claims and keep formal records documenting relevant events.

You may also wish to seek independent legal advice.

## **10 Complaints of retaliation because of disclosure**

The Company accepts that it has an obligation to ensure that those who make a disclosure without malice and in good faith are protected, regardless of whether the concern raised is upheld.

All those who have made a disclosure and who feel that, as a result, he/she/they have suffered adverse treatment should submit a formal complaint under the grievance procedure as set out in the Employee Handbook detailing what has been done to him/her. If it appears that there are reasonable grounds for making the complaint, the onus will be on the person against whom the complaint of adverse treatment has been made to show that the actions complained of were not taken in retaliation for the disclosure.

Where it is determined that there is a prima facie case that a worker has suffered adverse treatment, harassment, or victimisation because of his/her/their disclosure, a further investigation may take place and disciplinary action may be taken against the perpetrator in accordance with the relevant procedure.

## **11 External disclosure**

If, having exhausted this procedure, you are not satisfied with the Company's response and reasonably believe that the information disclosed, and any allegation contained in it, are substantially true, you are at liberty to take the matter further by raising it with certain bodies or persons such as

- A Member of Parliament.
- A legal adviser; or
- For DfE/ESFA related issues you may make a disclosure directly to DfE/ESFA. A link explaining how to make direct disclosures to the ESFA as the main funding body can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-esfa-handles-whistleblowing-disclosures>

- Other bodies or persons (if any) prescribed by the Secretary of State under Section 43F of the Employment Protection Act 1996, as amended by Section 1 of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

If you make an external complaint in **good faith** to any prescribed body or person after exhausting the Company’s procedure, under a **reasonable belief** that the disclosure is **true** and **without private gain**, you will be protected against victimisation or other adverse treatment.

**12 Further Guidance**

Further guidance about Whistleblowing for employees can be found at the government website <https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing> alternatively a whistleblowing charity that advises and supports individuals and organisations is Protect, the link to their website is <https://protect-advice.org.uk/>

<b>Date Reviewed</b>	22/04/2024
<b>Reviewed</b>	Annually
<b>Version Status</b>	Approved
<b>Approved By:</b>	  Company Director: <span style="float: right;">Date 22/04/24</span>