

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Keele University is committed to conducting business with honesty and integrity, and expects all staff to maintain high standards of professionalism in exercising their duties. However, all organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.
- 1.2 This Policy covers all Members of the University as defined by University Statute 2 and also applies to consultants, contractors, volunteers, interns, and casual and agency workers. References to students shall also be deemed to include apprentices.
- 1.3 The aims of this Policy are:
- (a) To encourage Members of the University to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected.
 - (b) To provide Members of the University with guidance as to how to raise those concerns.
 - (c) To reassure Members of the University that they should be able to raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- 1.4 This Policy takes account of the *Whistleblowing Arrangements Code of Practice* issued by the British Standards Institute and Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work). It has been agreed following consultation with the Trade Unions and Students' Unions. It is also in compliance with the Code of Fundraising Practice issued by the Fundraising Regulator. It should be read in conjunction with the University's [Whistleblowing Procedure](#).
- 1.5 This Policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and we may amend it at any time.

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 2.1 The Audit and Risk Committee has overall responsibility for this Policy, and for reviewing the effectiveness of actions taken in response to concerns raised under this Policy.
- 2.2 The Whistleblowing Officer has day-to-day operational responsibility for this Policy and must ensure that all managers and other staff who may deal with concerns or investigations under this Policy receive regular and appropriate training.
- 2.3 The review referenced in section 2.1 above should include:
- (a) a summary report of the number and type of concerns raised, in particular whether any relate to victimisation or breach of confidentiality;

- (b) a summary report of the outcome of any subsequent investigations;
- (c) feedback from individuals accessing and using the Policy;
- (d) staff awareness, trust and confidence in the arrangements.

2.4 All Members of the University are responsible for the success of this Policy and should ensure that they use it to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing. Members of the University are invited to comment on this Policy and suggest ways in which it might be improved. Comments, suggestions and queries should be addressed to the Whistleblowing Officer.

3. WHAT IS WHISTLEBLOWING?

3.1 **Whistleblowing** is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may include:

- (a) criminal activity
- (b) failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements
- (c) miscarriages of justice
- (d) danger to health and safety
- (e) damage to the environment
- (f) bribery under our Anti- Bribery Policy
- (g) financial fraud or mismanagement under our Fraud Response Procedure
- (h) research misconduct under our Research Integrity Policy
- (i) breach of our internal policies and procedures
- (j) conduct likely to damage our reputation or financial wellbeing
- (k) unauthorised disclosure of confidential information
- (l) negligence
- (m) the deliberate concealment of any of the above matters
- (n) Sexual harassment

3.2 The wrongdoing could take place anywhere in the world, not necessarily under the laws of England and Wales, and could include action by staff, students or contractors.

3.3 A **whistleblower** is a person who raises a reasonably held concern relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities (a **whistleblowing concern**) you should report it under this Policy.

3.4 Whistleblowing is where an individual has a concern about danger or illegality that has a public interest aspect to it: usually because it threatens others (e.g. customers, shareholders or the public). A staff grievance or complaint is, by contrast, a dispute about an employee's employment position or experience and has no additional public interest dimension. This Policy should not be used for complaints relating to your own personal circumstances, such as the way you have been treated at work. In those cases you should refer to the Grievance Procedure as appropriate.

3.5 If you are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this Policy you should seek advice from the Whistleblowing Officer, whose contact details are at the end of this Policy.

4. RAISING A WHISTLEBLOWING CONCERN

- 4.1 We hope that in many cases you will be able to raise any concerns with your University point of contact (line manager, academic mentor, Programme Director etc.). You may tell them in person or put the matter in writing if you prefer. They may be able to agree a way of resolving your concern quickly and effectively. In some cases they may refer the matter to the Whistleblowing Officer.
- 4.2 However, where the matter is more serious, or you feel that the point of contact has not addressed your concern, or you prefer not to raise it with them for any reason, you should contact one of the following:
- (a) The Whistleblowing Officer (the Secretary to Council)
 - (b) The Director of Legal & Information Compliance

Contact details are set out at the end of this Policy.

- 4.3 Once a disclosure has been made, we will contact you as soon as possible to find out more about your concern, and we may arrange a meeting with you either via Microsoft Teams or in person as part of an initial assessment (see section 3.1 of the Whistleblowing Procedure). You may bring a colleague/friend or union representative to any meetings under this Policy. Your companion must respect the confidentiality of your disclosure and any subsequent investigation.
- 4.4 We will take down a written summary of your concern and provide you with a copy after the meeting. We will also aim to give you an indication of how we propose to deal with the matter.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 5.1 We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this Policy. However, if you want to raise your concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret subject to the provisions of section 4.1 of the Whistleblowing Procedure. If it is necessary for anyone investigating your concern to know your identity, we will discuss this with you.
- 5.2 We do allow, but do not encourage, anonymous disclosures. Proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from you. It is also more difficult to establish whether any allegations are credible. Whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should come forward to the Whistleblowing Officer (or another University key contact listed within section 10) and appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality. If you are in any doubt you can seek advice from Protect, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline whose contact details are at the end of this Policy or your Trade Union representative or ASK in the Students' Union.

6. INVESTIGATION AND OUTCOME

- 6.1 The investigation will be carried out in accordance with section 3 of the Whistleblowing Procedure. Once you have raised a concern, we will normally carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation in line with section 4.3 above. We will inform you of the outcome of our assessment. You may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.
- 6.2 In some cases we may appoint an investigator or team of investigators including staff with relevant

experience of investigations or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable us to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

- 6.3 We will aim to keep you informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, sometimes the need for confidentiality may prevent us giving you specific details of the investigation or any disciplinary action taken as a result. You should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.
- 6.4 If after investigation it is concluded that a whistleblower has made allegations maliciously or with a view to personal gain, the whistleblower may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the University's disciplinary procedures.

7. IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED

- 7.1 While we cannot always guarantee the outcome you are seeking, we will try to deal with your concern fairly and in an appropriate way. By using this Policy you can help us to achieve this.
- 7.2 If you are not happy with the way in which your concern has been handled, you can raise it with another University key contact listed in section 10. You may also contact the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee; or Protect (independent whistleblowing charity) or for concerns that relate to fundraising practice, the Fundraising Regulator. Contact details are set out at the end of this Policy.

8. EXTERNAL DISCLOSURES

- 8.1 The aim of this Policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In most cases you should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.
- 8.2 The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for you to report your concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external, other than regulators. The independent whistleblowing charity, Protect, operates a confidential helpline. They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern. Their contact details are at the end of this Policy.
- 8.3 Whistleblowing concerns usually relate to the conduct of our staff, but they may sometimes relate to the actions of a third party, such as a contractor or service provider. In some circumstances the law will protect you if you raise the matter with the third party directly. However, we encourage you to report such concerns internally first. You should contact your point of contact or the Whistleblowing Officer for guidance.

9. PROTECTION AND SUPPORT FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS

- 9.1 It is understandable that whistleblowers are sometimes worried about possible repercussions. We aim to encourage openness and will support Members of the University who raise genuine concerns under this Policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.
- 9.2 Whistleblowers must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If you believe that you have suffered any such

treatment, you should inform the Whistleblowing Officer immediately. If the matter is not remedied you should raise it formally using our Grievance Procedure.

- 9.3 No Member of the University shall threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way. Any incidents of such conduct may be subject to disciplinary action. In some cases the whistleblower could have a right to sue a Member of the University personally for compensation in an employment tribunal.
- 9.4 The University has a staff counselling provision in place for all staff. Should you have any concerns following a whistleblowing disclosure, you may wish to access support as the process progresses. Counselling provision is accessed via the Occupational Health department. Students may wish to contact the Student Services Team.

10. CONTACTS

Whistleblowing Officer (Secretary to Council)	Fiona Dumbelton 01782 733373 f.dumbelton@keele.ac.uk
Director of Legal & Information Compliance	Anne-Marie Long 01782 734497 a.long@keele.ac.uk
Staff Counselling Service Accessed via Occupational Health	Occupational Health 01782 733733 occupationalhealth.enquiries@keele.ac.uk
Student Services	01782 734481 student.services@keele.ac.uk
Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee	Contact via the Secretary to Council, marking correspondence as FAO - Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee.
Protect (Independent whistleblowing charity – formerly <i>Public Concern at Work</i>)	Helpline: (020) 3117 2520 E-mail: via their online form Website: https://protect-advice.org.uk/
Fundraising Regulator (concerns relating to fundraising practice may be referred to the UK regulator)	Complaint Helpline: 0300 999 3407 Website: https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/complaints

11. REVIEW, APPROVAL & PUBLICATION

- 11.1 The Whistleblowing Officer will submit an annual report to the Audit & Risk Committee outlining the concerns raised under this Policy (even if a nil return) and the action taken; with the Committee's role being to review the effectiveness of the remedial action/recommendations.
- 11.2 The Policy should be reviewed at least every 3 years, with any amendments to be approved by the University Executive Committee, following consultation with key stakeholders. The current Policy will be published on the University website.

12. DOCUMENT CONTROL INFORMATION

Document Name	Whistleblowing Policy
Owner	Secretary to Council (<i>Whistleblowing Officer</i>)
Version Number	V2.0
Equality Analysis Decision and Date	TBC
Approval Date	28/05/2024
Approved By	University Executive Committee
Date of Commencement	09/02/2021
Date of Last Review	28/05/2024
Date for Next Review	28/05/2027
Related University Policy Documents	Whistleblowing Procedure, Fraud Response Procedure; Anti-Bribery Policy; Research Integrity Policy; Freedom of Expression Code of Practice; Ordinance D3 (Grievance Procedures), Reportable Events Procedure, Incident and Business Continuity Management Policy, Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy, Sexual Violence and Misconduct Procedure (Staff)
<i>Administrative Updates (approved by Director)</i>	<i>03/03/2022 – To include reference to apprentices in 1.3; update logo. 09/03/2022 – Protect contact details updated. 13/04/2026 – To include Sexual Harassment under the scope of the Policy and the related policy documents as required by the Employment Rights Act 2025 and to update contact details.</i>