



Windsor Academy Trust

Confidential Reporting Policy	
Responsible Committee:	Windsor Academy Trust, Board of Directors
Date revised by Board of Directors:	October 2016
Next review date:	October 2018

Confidential Reporting Policy

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within the Windsor Academy Trust (WAT.) However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Trust. 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.
- 1.2. The Trust is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees and others that we deal with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of its work, to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that most cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.
- 1.3. This Policy makes it clear that you can do so without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. *This Confidential Reporting Policy is intended to encourage and enable employees to raise serious concerns **within** the Trust rather than overlooking a problem or “blowing the whistle” outside.*
- 1.4. This Policy applies to all employees of WAT, and external staff/ contractors working for WAT on our premises, for example, agency staff, sub-contractors, voluntary helpers and students.
- 1.5. These procedures are in addition to WAT’s grievance procedure, complaints procedures and other statutory reporting procedures.
- 1.6. This Policy has been discussed with the relevant trade unions and has their support.

2. AIMS AND SCOPE OF THIS POLICY

- 2.1. This Policy applies to each Academy within WAT and aims to:
 - Encourage you to feel confident in raising concerns and to question and act upon concerns about practice
 - Provide avenues for you to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
 - Ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied
 - Reassure you that you will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in good faith.

2.2. The Confidential Reporting Policy is intended to cover major concerns that are in the public interest and that fall outside the scope of other procedures. These include:

- Conduct which is an offence or a breach of law, including data protection
- Disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- Significant health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
- Damage to the environment
- The unauthorised use of public funds
- Possible fraud and corruption
- Sexual, emotional or physical abuse or neglect of clients, or other unethical conduct.

2.3. Thus, any serious concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of any Academy staff, Local Advisory Body (LAB) members, Directors or others acting on behalf of WAT, can be reported under the Confidential Reporting Policy. This may be about something that:

- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the School subscribes to; or
- is against the WAT's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and policies; or
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

2.4. There are existing procedures in place to enable you to lodge a grievance relating to your own employment. Therefore personal grievances (e.g. bullying, harassment, discrimination) will be dealt with under the WAT Grievance policy, unless your particular case is in the public interest.

3. SAFEGUARDS

3.1. Harassment or Victimisation

3.1.1 WAT is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees.

3.1.2 WAT recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If what you are saying is true, or if you have reasonable grounds for believing that it is true, disclosure forms part of your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.

3.1.3 WAT will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern under this policy in good faith.

3.1.4 Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect you.

4. CONFIDENTIALITY

4.1. All concerns raised under this policy will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity, if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may be asked to come forward as a witness.

5. ANONYMOUS ALLEGATIONS

This Policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. It may be difficult to progress anonymous complaints, the WAT will endeavour to do so depending on;

- The seriousness of the issues raised
- The credibility of the concern; and
- The likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

6. UNTRUE ALLEGATIONS

6.1. If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

7. HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN

7.1. As a first step you should normally raise concerns with your immediate line manager, the Headteacher or the Chair of the LAB. This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if you believe that the Headteacher is involved, you should approach the Chief Executive or Chair of the Board of Directors. This person may delegate an alternative appropriate person to investigate the complaint. This will be the Responsible Person.

7.2. Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. Staff who wish to make a written report are invited to use the following format:

- the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates), and
- the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.

7.3. The earlier you express the concern the easier it is to take action.

7.4. Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are reasonable grounds for your concern.

7.5. Advice or guidance on how to pursue matters of concern may be obtained internally from:

Keith Sorrell, Chief Executive

Tel: 0121 504 0972

ksorrell@windsoracademytrust.org.uk

(Insert Academy Contact Details)

If you are unsure whether or how to use this Policy, you may seek free confidential help from the independent charity, **Public Concern at Work**

Tel: 0207-404-6609 whistle@pcaw.co.uk

Public Concern at Work will also be able to help if you feel that it would be inappropriate to speak to any of the officers referred to above.

- 7.6. You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns.
- 7.7. You may invite your trade union, professional association representative or a friend to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

8. HOW THE TRUST WILL RESPOND

- 8.1. WAT will respond to your concerns. Do not forget that testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.
- 8.2. Where appropriate, the matters raised may:
 - be investigated internally within the school by management or through the school's disciplinary process
 - be referred to the police
 - form the subject of an independent inquiry.
- 8.3. In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. The overriding principle which WAT will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.
- 8.4. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.
- 8.5. Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the Responsible Person will write to you:
 - acknowledging that the concern has been received
 - indicating how we propose to deal with the matter
 - giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
 - telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made
 - supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms, and
 - telling you whether further investigations will take place and, if not, why not.
- 8.6. The amount of contact between the officers of WAT considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, WAT will seek further information from you.
- 8.7. Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a union or professional association representative or a friend.
- 8.8. WAT will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, WAT will arrange for you to receive advice about the procedure.
- 8.9. WAT accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, we will inform you of the outcome of any investigation.

9. REVIEW

9.1. If you do not receive a response within 10 working days, or do not feel the matter has been properly investigated you should inform the Chair of the Board of Directors in writing.

10. THE RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

10.1. The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this Policy. WAT will maintain a record of concerns raised and the outcomes (but in a form which does not endanger your confidentiality) and will report to the Board of Directors.

11. HOW THE MATTER CAN BE TAKEN FURTHER

11.1. This Policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within WAT to raise concerns. WAT hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not, and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the WAT, having first exhausted your rights under paragraphs 7.1 and 9.1 , the following are possible contact points:

- your trade union
- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- a relevant voluntary organisation
- the police
- Public Concern at Work (see paragraph 7.5 above).

11.2. If you do take the matter outside WAT, you should ensure that you do not disclose confidential information.