



THE CONSORTIUM
ACADEMY TRUST

Shaping Positive Futures

Whistleblowing Policy

The Consortium Academy Trust (TCAT)
An Exempt Charity Limited by Guarantee
Company Number 07665828

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1. Background

Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within The Consortium Academy Trust (TCAT). However, they may decide not to express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the Trust or Academy. 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. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 provides statutory protection to employees making disclosures and the Trust extends the principles of that Act into this policy to give, Trustees, governors, partners, and members of the public the same route to raise concerns.

2. Definitions for the Purposes of this Policy

2.1 Irregularities fall within the following categories, of which the majority are criminal offences:

Fraud – as set out in the Fraud Act 2006, which created a new general offence of fraud. Fraud can be committed by:

- False representation
- Failing to disclose information
- Abuse of position

Other offences created under the Fraud Act are:

- Possession of articles for use in frauds
- Making or supplying articles for use in frauds
- Participating in a fraudulent business carried on by a sole trader
- Obtaining services dishonestly

Theft – Dishonestly appropriating the property of another with the intention of permanently depriving them of it. This may include the removal or misuse of funds, assets or cash (Theft Act 1968).

False Accounting - Dishonestly destroying, defacing, concealing or falsifying any account, record or document required for any accounting purpose, with a view to personal gain or gain for another, or with intent to cause loss to another or furnishing information which is or may be misleading, false or deceptive (Theft Act 1968).

Bribery– A person is guilty of bribery, as defined by the Bribery Act 2010, if they either:

Offer, promise or give a financial or other advantage to another person, and intends the advantage to induce a person to perform improperly a relevant function to activity or to reward a person for the improper performance of such a function or activity or offer, promise or give a financial or other advantage to another person, and knows or believes that the acceptance of the advantage would itself constitute the improper performance of a relevant function or activity

Money Laundering - The conversion or transfer of property, knowing that such property is derived from serious crime, for the purpose of concealing or disguising the illicit origin of the property or of assisting any person who is involved in committing such an offence or offences to evade the legal consequences of his action, and the concealment or disguise of the true nature, source, location, disposition, movement, rights with respect to, or ownership of property, knowing that such property is derived from serious crime. (Money Laundering Regulations 2007)

Collusion - The term “collusion” in the context of reporting fraud is used to cover any case in which someone incites, instigates, aids and abets, conspires or attempts to commit any of the crimes listed above.

Failure to observe the laws of the land

Failure to observe, or breaches of, The Constitution, Scheme of Delegation, Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules.

Failure to observe, or breaches of, departmental procedures or Health & Safety Regulations - in some circumstances can constitute an irregularity, with potentially significant financial consequences.

Failure to observe, or breaches of, procedures and guidelines issued by the respective Safeguarding Children Board with the risk that children may suffer harm. Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 place a duty on relevant partners, persons or bodies working with children to co-operate with a view to improving the well-being of children. It is this duty that supports early intervention to safeguard and promote children and young people’s well-being in order that good outcomes can be delivered.

N.B. In the case of child protection issues, the procedures and guidelines issued by the respective school’s Children’s Safeguarding Board must be followed and the Statutory document Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Failure to comply with the Trusts employment policies including cases of harassment and bullying.

Failure to comply with the Trusts policy and legal requirements in relation to the protection of children and vulnerable people.

All Benefit Related Fraud, including Tax Reduction and Discounts, Tenancy Fraud and Blue Badge Fraud etc.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 We are committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability and expect Trustees and employees at all levels will protect the Trust and its resources and

lead by example, ensuring high standards of personal conduct and adherence to policies, procedures and rules.

3.2 In line with this commitment, we encourage employees, Trustees, governors, partners, with any concerns about any aspect of the Trust's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that certain cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis.

3.3 We will not tolerate any occurrence of irregularities and operate a 'zero tolerance' approach to known instances and attempts. We will take all appropriate measures to protect our employees and partners, including children and vulnerable people, and public funds and to reduce the risk of an irregularity occurring from either internal or external sources. Whenever an irregularity of any description is detected it will be investigated and appropriate prosecution, disciplinary and recovery action will be taken.

3.4 This Whistleblowing Policy applies to all employees, and workers (including those designated as casual, temporary, agency, authorised volunteers or work experience), contractors and partners working for the Trust on or off our premises, and the public and is intended to encourage and enable people to raise any concerns within the Trust rather than overlooking a problem or blowing the whistle outside without fear of reprisals or victimisation.

3.5 This policy aims to:

- encourage employees to feel confident in raising concerns
- provide avenues for employees to raise concerns in confidence (and if necessary, anonymously) and receive feedback on any action taken
- allow employees to take the matter further if they are dissatisfied with our response, and
- reassure them that they will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistle blowing and appropriate action will be taken should this occur.

3.6 There are existing procedures in place to enable employees to lodge a grievance relating to their own employment. This Whistleblowing Policy is intended to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures.

4. What is covered by the Policy?

4.1 A concern may be about something that:

1. Is unlawful; or
2. Is against the Trust's Constitution or policies; or
3. Falls below established standards or practice; or
4. Amounts to improper conduct.

4.2 A concern can therefore relate to any unethical or unprofessional conduct relating to the Trust, including malpractice, and abuse. This not only covers acts that have occurred but also those that may potentially occur

4.3 Examples of malpractice in this context may include concerns about possible fraud and corruption, financial irregularities, dangerous procedures risking health and safety to the

public as well as to other employees, abuse or bullying of clients including children and vulnerable people, evasion of statutory responsibilities, environmental issues, etc. The overriding concern should be that it would be in the public interest for the malpractice to be corrected and, if appropriate, sanctions applied.

5. Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

5.1 This Act gives statutory protection, within defined parameters, to employees who make disclosures about a range of subjects, which they believe to be happening within the employing organisation.

5.2 The Act has rules for making a protected disclosure:

- you must reasonably believe the disclosure is in the public interest
- you must believe it to be substantially true
- you must not act maliciously or make false allegations
- you must not seek any personal gain

5.3 By regulations issued under the Act, the Audit Commission has taken on new responsibilities as a “prescribed person” that involves receiving disclosures from employees when those employees are unable or unwilling to make the disclosure internally.

5.4 The Commission, along with their appointed representatives, has the responsibility to ensure that disclosures are properly investigated and will report its findings to the person making the disclosure.

6 Safeguards

Harassment or Victimisation

6.1 We recognise that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the alleged malpractice. We will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect an individual when an employee raises a concern.

6.2 This does not mean that if an employee is already the subject of disciplinary or redundancy procedures, that those procedures will be halted because of whistleblowing.

Anonymous Allegations & Confidentiality

6.3 This policy encourages employees to put their name to the allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less capable of being investigated effectively, but they will be considered by the Trust.

6.4 The factors to be considered in determining whether to proceed with an anonymous allegation would include the:

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

6.5 It must be appreciated that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by the whistle-blower may be required as part of the evidence.

Untrue Allegations

6.6 When making an allegation there must be reasonable belief that the concerns are true, though there is no requirement to provide evidence to prove the allegation. The whistle-blower must be able to show that they believe that disclosing the concern is in the public interest and that it is a reasonable view to hold in the circumstances at the time. Note that it is not the whistle-blower's responsibility to investigate the matter, it is the Trust's responsibility.

6.7 If a whistle-blower makes an allegation that they believe is in the public interest, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against them.

6.8 If, however, the allegation is malicious or vexatious, legal or disciplinary action may be taken against them.

7 How to Raise a Concern

7.1 This will depend on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is thought to be involved in the malpractice.

7.2 Employee concerns should firstly be raised within the school they are employed in or shared services with either:

| Contact Position | Contact Details (to be completed by each school) | Type of Concern |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Your Head Teacher | | All |
| Your Chair of Governors | | All |
| The Chair of The Trust | | All |
| Director of People | | Employment policy related concerns only |
| Director of Finance | | Financial matters, including fraud. |
| Chief Executive Officer | | All |
| Your Trade Union representative | | All |

7.3 Advice and guidance on how matters of concern may be pursued can be obtained from the same sources.

7.4 Whilst Headteachers should establish as many details as possible (by discussion with the whistle-blower only) they should formally report the incident to the Chair of the Trust and the Chief Executive Officer.

7.5 Where a concern/multiple concerns is/are raised that contain an element of potential noncompliance with one or more of our employment policies, the Headteacher/CEO will liaise with the Director of People to determine who will lead the investigation.

7.6 If the concerns are regarding abuse to children contact should be made with the Safeguarding Children teams as follows:

- Children – via Customer Services team - 01482 395500
- Out of Hours – Emergency Duty Team – 01377 241273

7.7 If there is an immediate risk, emergency services should be called on 999 or 101 for local Police.

7.8 If the whistle-blower is unable to talk to anyone within the Trust, or is not satisfied with the response the following external agencies can be contacted:

| Contact | Contact Details |
|--|--|
| External Auditor: Forrester Boyd | 01472 350601 |
| Company Solicitor, Rollits, | 01482 337341 |
| Local Authority Designated Officer (Safeguarding Children) or the NSPCC | 01482 392139 0800 028 0285 |
| Audit Commission – Public Interest Disclosure line | 0845 052 2646 |
| Public Concern at Work (they are an independent charity, which provides free advice for persons who wish to express concern about fraud and other serious malpractice) | 020 7404 6609 helpline@pcw.co.uk www.pcaw.co.uk |
| Humberside Police | 0845 6060222 or 101 (Non-emergency reporting line) |

7.8 Concerns are better raised in writing. Whistle-blowers are invited to set out the background and history of the concern, giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reason why they are particularly concerned about the situation. If they do not feel able to put their concern in writing, the telephone numbers in 7.2 and 7.7 are provided as an alternative.

7.9 The earlier a concern is disclosed, the easier it is to act. This is particularly important where the well-being of children may be at risk.

7.10 Although a whistle-blower is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, they will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for their concern. They do not need evidence just sufficient grounds for concern. Under no circumstances should they investigate a concern, as this may risk prejudicing any investigation, which could include a criminal investigation if it is warranted. Further, this will protect them from any repercussions.

7.11 A whistle-blower is entitled to invite their Trade Union Representative, or workplace colleague who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates or professional association to assist them in raising a matter.

7.12 Details of matters discussed with the contact will be kept confidential.

8. How the Trust will respond

8.1 The action taken will depend on the nature of the concern. The Chair of the Trust, Headteacher and CEO in conjunction with any other appropriate officer(s) will determine the most appropriate action to be taken. The matter raised may:

- be investigated internally
- be referred to the Police
- be referred to the external Auditor
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

8.2 To protect individuals, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Concerns or allegations that fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

8.3 Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation.

8.4 Where contact details have been provided, within ten working days of a concern being received, the Headteacher, CEO or Chair of the Trust will respond to the whistle-blower:

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how they propose to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- informing whether any initial enquiries have been made, and
- informing whether further investigations will take place, and if not, why not

N.B. In the case of child protection issues, the procedures and guidance issued by the relevant Local Authority Safeguarding Children Board will be followed. The amount of contact between the employees considering the issues and the whistle-blower will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought.

8.6 When any meeting is arranged, the whistle-blower will have the right, if they wish, to be accompanied by a Trade Union Representative or a workplace colleague who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates.

8.7 The Trust will take steps to minimise any difficulties, which may be experienced because of raising a concern. For instance, if the whistle-blower is required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, we will advise about the procedure.

8.8 The Trust accepts that the whistle-blower will need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, they will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.

9. How the Matter can be Taken Further

9.1 This policy is intended to provide an employee with an avenue to raise concerns within the Trust. We hope you will be satisfied. If you are not, and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the Trust, the following are possible contact points:

- relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- your solicitor
- the Police
- Public Concern at Work
- Trade Union/professional association
- the Ombudsman
- the Trust's External Auditor

9.2 If the matter is taken outside of the Trust, a whistle-blower will need to ensure that they do not disclose information that is privileged to the Trust and if they are an employee that they do not breach their obligations under the Trust's Code of Conduct for Employees (see 9.3 below).

9.3 Whilst all the code is important, the paragraph concerning contact with the press and media (including social media) is particularly relevant.

10. Responsibility

10.1 The Responsible Officer is the Director of Governance, who has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy.

10.2 The Director of People will maintain a record of concerns raised and action taken, which will not endanger the whistle-blowers confidentiality and will be reported as necessary.

10.3 We are committed to preventing occurrences of irregularities. To help achieve this objective there is a clear network of systems and procedures in place.

11. Outcomes

11.1 The desirable outcomes of this policy are to:

- support the Trust's 'zero tolerance' of irregularities
- reassure individuals that there is a safe alternative to silence
- promote the whistle-blower as a witness not complainant
- encourage leaders and managers to be open to concerns
- support the Trust in being a well-managed Multi Academy Trust
- promote effective compliance
- support the Trust's Risk Management Strategy.

12. Evaluation

12.1 The success of this policy may be assessed by:

- the number of reported incidents of malpractice
- monitoring whether individuals feel able to report occurrences without fear or favour.