
Bury College Strategies, Policy, and Procedures

Document Information

Public Interest Disclosure Policy (Whistleblowing)

Introduction

- 1.1 The College is committed to operating in an ethical and principled way. The aim of this policy and procedure is to provide employees, Corporation Members and individuals (referred to as 'individuals' in this policy) with a means for raising genuine concerns of suspected bribery, breaches of the law and other serious wrongdoings, in an ethical manner and in line with College Values and Objectives.
- 1.2 The College encourages individuals 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 College.
- 1.3 This policy and procedure also aims to encourage individuals to raise genuine concerns through internal College procedures without fear of adverse repercussions being taken against them. The law allows individuals to raise such concerns externally and this policy informs individuals 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.
- 1.4 This policy and procedure also seeks to balance the need to allow a culture of openness against the need to protect other individuals against vexatious allegations or allegations which are not well-founded.
- 1.5 The principles of openness and accountability which underpin legislation protecting whistleblowers are reflected in this policy and procedure. The College is also committed to ensuring compliance with the Bribery Act 2010.
- 1.6 Learners at the College are also encouraged to raise genuine concerns about suspected wrongdoing by making a complaint to Head of Quality. This policy and procedure is designed for the use of individuals of the College.

2. Applicability of this policy and procedure

- 2.1 The policy applies to all "workers at the College. The term 'worker' within this document refers to a wider group of individuals than just employees. It applies to Corporation members, employees, agency workers, apprentices and third party contractors whose work is controlled by the Company, those working under training contracts and volunteers.
- 2.2 Individuals might be unsure whether it is appropriate to raise their concern under this policy and procedure or whether it is a personal grievance, which is more appropriate to raise under the College's grievance procedure. Any individual in this situation is encouraged to approach the Director of Human Resources in confidence for advice.

3. Protected Disclosures

- 3.1 If workers bring information about a wrongdoing to the attention of their employers or a relevant organisation, they are protected in certain circumstances under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
- 3.2 If a worker has a serious concern relating to one of the areas listed below the matter can be reported, in the manner set out in this procedure, without fear of reprisal.

- 3.3 The law protects individuals who, out of a sense of public duty, want to reveal suspected wrongdoing or malpractice.
- 3.4 The law allows individuals to raise what it defines as a 'protected disclosure'. In order to be a protected disclosure, a disclosure must relate to a specific subject matter (See Section 4 below) and the disclosure must also be made in an appropriate way (See Section 5). A 'protected disclosure' must, in the reasonable belief of the individual making it, also be made in the public interest. A protected disclosure must consist of information and not merely be allegations of suspected malpractice.
- 3.5 The law prevents non-disclosure agreements that prevent protected disclosures from being made, for example, in Settlement Agreements. That is, the Employment Rights Act 2025 made any provision in an agreement between an employer and a worker void in so far as it purports to prevent the worker from making an allegation or a disclosure of information relating to relevant harassment or discrimination.

4. Specific Subject Matter

- 4.1 If, in the course of employment, an individual becomes aware of information which they reasonably believe tends to show one or more of the following, they must use this policy and procedure:
 - That a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed;
 - That an individual has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject;
 - That a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur.
 - That the health or safety of any individual has been, is being, or is likely to be, endangered.
 - That the environment, has been, is being, or is likely to be, damaged.
 - That information tending to show any of the above, is being, or is likely to be, deliberately concealed.
 - That an instance of Malpractice has occurred, is occurring, or is likely to occur.
- 4.2 Examples of Malpractice are (but not limited to):
 - Actions which are unprofessional, inappropriate or conflict with a general understanding of what is right and wrong, e.g. falsification of student grades or actions which call into question the integrity of educational standards;
 - Failure to comply with a statutory obligation, e.g. Safeguarding;
 - Gaining, or seeking to gain, a pecuniary advantage from an association or relationship with, or membership of, an organisation, company or other body which ought properly to have been disclosed to the College.
 - Fraud or financial irregularities (including improper or unauthorised use of public funds);
 - Bribery, corruption (including abuse of authority) or other forms of

dishonesty, e.g. showing undue favour over a contractual matter or to a job applicant;

- A breach of code of conduct;

- 4.3 Note, sexual harassment disclosures are expressly protected as “whistleblowing” and workers reporting such harassment are protected from detriment or dismissal if they have reasonable belief that their disclosure is made in the public interest.
- 4.4 Complaints about breaches of employees’ own contract of Employment should be raised as a grievance and not as part of this policy and procedure.

5. Procedure for making a disclosure

- 5.1 Information which an individual reasonably believes tends to show one or more of the situations given in Section 4 should promptly be disclosed to the Director of Human Resources Student and Customer Services so that any appropriate action can be taken.
- 5.2 If the disclosure relates to the Principal and Chief Executive or another Senior Postholder, or member of the Leadership Team, an individual can raise the issue with Clerk of the Corporation. In the event that the disclosure relates to the Clerk of the Corporation, an individual can raise the issue with the Chair of the Board of Governors
- 5.3 Individuals are encouraged to identify themselves when making a disclosure. If an anonymous disclosure is made, the College will not be in a position to notify the individual making the disclosure of the outcome of action taken by the College. Anonymity also means that the College will have difficulty in investigating such a concern. The College reserves the right to determine whether to apply this procedure in respect of an anonymised disclosure in light of the following considerations:
 - The seriousness of the issues raised in the disclosure;
 - The credibility of the concern; and
 - How likely it is that the concern can be confirmed from attributable sources.
- 5.4 If an individual wishes to make a disclosure verbally they can do so, to the people listed above
- 5.5 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 Human Resources.

6. Procedure for dealing with disclosures

- 6.1 It is important that all disclosures are handled in confidence and not discussed outside those directly involved as far as possible.
- 6.2 Concerns or allegations raised which fall within the scope of specific established procedures may be referred for consideration under those procedures. Concerns should not be brought under this procedure where the College already has guidelines/procedures in place to deal with the issue.
- 6.3 Receipt of disclosure will be acknowledged by the person having received it

within 5 working days and an indication given of how the College proposes to deal with the issue within 10 working days of the initial disclosure.

- 6.4 Some concerns may be capable of resolution by agreed action without the need for investigation.
- 6.5 However, usually the matters raised will be investigated by management, by internal audit or through disciplinary procedures. Alternatively they may be subject to independent enquiry.
- 6.6 A Leadership Team member or the College's Internal Auditors may be requested to undertake an investigation to establish the facts.

The investigation may take the following:

Step 1: A meeting should be arranged to take place within a reasonable period of time in order to find out more by considering any relevant documentation or supporting evidence in order to decide on the next steps. The person carrying out the investigation should be accompanied by a note-taker at this meeting.

Any such meeting can be held off-site at a mutually convenient location and time.

The investigator should prepare for the meeting in advance and, in consideration of any relevant documentation received, should explore the need of any clarification of the disclosure, request any additional supporting evidence and identify other potential witnesses.

STEP 2: After the meeting, the investigator will review the evidence relating to the investigation in order to establish whether or not the disclosure is supported. Further meetings might be arranged if the investigator deems these necessary.

STEP 3: The investigator will report back with the findings without any unnecessary delay. If the disclosure is supported, the Manager will either sanction action externally, e.g.

- Police;
- Funding Agencies/Bodies
- OFSTED
- National Audit Office
- External Audit organisation
- Health & Safety Executive
- Environmental Agency
- Serious Fraud Office
- Inland Revenue
- Local Authority
- Information Commissioner's office;

Or

- Take action internally, e.g. (disciplinary proceedings, internal audit, review of internal policies and procedures).

- 6.7 Where a fraud has been discovered, the Chair of the Corporation, the Chair of the Audit Committee and the College's Internal Auditors should be informed immediately.

Subject to the nature of the fraud, the Department for Education should also be informed.

[Blowing the whistle to the Department for Education - GOV.UK](#)

- 6.8 Due note must be taken of College Disciplinary Procedures particularly where the matter might involve the suspension of a member of staff. The relevant sections of the disciplinary procedure would be used to determine whether a member of staff suspected of fraud or corruption would be suspended on full pay. The suspended person would be required to hand over items such as key, documents and College property. The suspended individual will be denied access to College premises.
- 6.9 With regard to allegations where the Police are involved, the College will be guided by the Police as to when the person can be informed.
- 6.10 The College will take appropriate steps to minimise any difficulties that a member of staff may experience as a result of using this procedure.
- 6.11 The person making the disclosure will be given as much information as possible on the outcome of the investigation, subject to the constraints of the College's duty of confidentiality or any other legal constraint.

The person who is the subject of the disclosure will be informed of the allegations as early as possible in the process.

Although it is difficult to be prescriptive about time scales it is in the best interests of all parties for any investigations to be undertaken as speedily as possible.

The individual will be written to, to confirm the outcome and the discloser will also be given a note confirming how the disclosure has been addressed.

- 6.12 A discloser who has not had a response within the time limits stated above or otherwise feels that the complaint is not being dealt with appropriately has the right to appeal to the Principal. The Principal will make a final decision on action to be taken and will notify the discloser of the outcome. The appeal will be final.

If the Principal has been personally involved in the case, then the appeal will be made to the Clerk of Corporation.

7 Safeguards for individuals making a disclosure

- 7.1 An individual making a disclosure under this procedure can expect their matter to be treated confidentially by the College and, where applicable, their name will not be disclosed to anyone implicated in the suspected wrongdoing, without their prior approval.
- 7.2 The College will take all reasonable steps to ensure that any report of recommendations, or other relevant documentation, produced by the College does not identify the individual making the disclosure without their written consent, or unless the College is legally obliged to do so, or for the purposes of seeking legal advice.
- 7.3 No formal disciplinary action will be taken against an individual on the grounds of making a disclosure made under this policy or procedure. This does not prevent the College from bringing disciplinary action against an individual where the College has grounds to believe that a disclosure was made maliciously or vexatiously, or where a disclosure is made outside the College without reasonable grounds.
- 7.4 An individual will not suffer dismissal or any detrimental action or omission of

any type (including informal pressure or any form of victimisation) by the College for making a disclosure in accordance with this policy and procedure. Equally, where an individual is threatened, bullied, pressurised or victimised by a colleague for making a disclosure, disciplinary action will be taken by the College against the colleague in question.

8. Disclosure to external bodies:

8.1 This policy and procedure has been implemented to allow individuals to raise disclosures internally within the College. An individual has the right to make a disclosure outside of the College where there are reasonable grounds to do so and in accordance with the law.

[Whistleblowing for employees](#)

8.2 Individuals may make a disclosure to an appropriate external body prescribed by the law. This list of 'prescribed' organisations and bodies can be found in information on [the GOV.UK website](#).

8.3 If you tell a prescribed person or body, it must be one that deals with the issue you're raising, for example a disclosure about wrongdoing in a College can be made to prescribed persons/ bodies on the list.

8.4 An individual can report knowledge or suspicions that the College has:

- claimed funding from the Department for Education (DfE) through deception.
- broken the funding rules.
- has not delivered education or training funded by DfE

by emailing allegations.mailbox@education.gov.uk

Note, this should not be used for: -

- the quality of education or leadership
- discrimination
- data protection
- exam malpractice or maladministration
- child protection and safeguarding
- contracts of employment
- contractual disputes between employees and employers,
- complaints about managers, including bullying and harassment

Full guidance on reporting fraud or irregularity can be found at [Blowing the whistle to the Department for Education - GOV.UK](#)

8.5 Individuals can also make disclosures on a confidential basis to a practising solicitor or barrister.

8.6 If an individual seeks advice outside of the College, they must be careful not to breach any confidentiality obligations or damage the College's reputation in so doing.

9. Accountability

- 9.1 The College will keep a record of all concerns raised under this policy and procedure (including cases where the College deems that there is no case to answer and therefore that no action should be taken) and will report to the Board of Governors on an annual basis as appropriate.

10. Further assistance for individuals

- 10.1 The College will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of individuals who make disclosures. If, at any stage of this procedure an individual 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 Principal and Chief Executive.
- 10.2 An individual making a disclosure may want to confidentially request counselling or other support from the College's occupational health service. Any such request for counselling or support services should be addressed to Director of Human Resources. Such a request would be made in confidence.
- 10.3 Note, if you report your concern to the media, in most cases you'll lose your whistleblowing law rights. Hence, before you take the matter outside of the College it is recommended that you contact and seek advice from Protect (formerly known as Public Concern at Work) for confidential advice on whistleblowing issues. Contact details are as follows:
- [Protect - Speak up stop harm - Whistleblowing Homepage](#)
- 3rd Floor, Bank Chambers
6 - 10 Borough High Street
London SE1 9QQ
- Whistleblowing Advice Line: 020 7404 6609
- 10.4 The College will be open and transparent with people who use our services and other 'relevant persons' (people acting lawfully on their behalf) in general in relation to the education, training and learning we provide. If things go wrong we will inform people about the incident, provide reasonable support, provide truthful information and an apology if appropriate.

[Whistleblowing: list of prescribed people and bodies - GOV.UK](#)