

UK Graduate College

Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Purpose and Scope.....	2
3. Safeguards.....	3
4. Procedures for Making a Disclosure.....	4
5. Timescales	4
6. Investigating Procedure.....	5
7. Policy Review	6

1. Introduction

- 1.1 UK Graduate College is committed to upholding the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability. An important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable staff and other members of the Company to raise concerns in a responsible and effective manner, without fear of reprisal. It is a fundamental principle of employment that employees owe a duty of confidentiality to their employer, this does not prevent the disclosure of information where there is a genuine belief of serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation. In such cases, concerns should be reported internally, and mechanisms are in place to allow this to happen independently of the normal line management structure where appropriate. For less serious matters, it may still be appropriate to raise concerns with a line manager in the first instance.
- 1.2 The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 offers legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. The Company has endorsed the provisions set out below to ensure that no members of staff should feel at a disadvantage in raising legitimate concerns.
- 1.3 It should be emphasised that this policy is intended to assist individuals who believe they have discovered malpractice or impropriety. It is not designed to question financial, or business decisions taken by the Company, nor should it be used to reconsider any matters which have already been addressed under harassment, complaint, disciplinary or other procedures.

2. Purpose and Scope

- 2.1 This policy is designed to enable employees of UK Graduate College to raise concerns internally and at a senior level and to disclose information which the individual believes indicates malpractice or impropriety. This policy is intended to cover concerns which are in the public interest and may at least initially be investigated separately but might then lead to the invocation of other procedures e.g., disciplinary. These concerns could include:
 - Financial malpractice or impropriety or fraud
 - Failure to comply with a legal obligation or Statutes
 - Danger to Health & Safety or the environment
 - Criminal activity
 - Improper conduct or unethical behaviour
 - Attempts to conceal any of these
 - Safeguarding failures or concerns involving students or vulnerable adults
 - Academic malpractice or breaches of assessment regulations

- Improper conduct, serious mismanagement, or unethical behaviour
- Attempts to conceal or suppress any of the above

This policy does not cover matters of individual employment concern, such as grievances, bullying, or harassment. These should be addressed through the appropriate HR procedures.

3. Safeguards

Protection

3.1 UK Graduate College is committed to protecting individuals who raise concerns under this policy, provided that:

- The disclosure is made in good faith.
- There is a reasonable belief that the information tends to show malpractice or impropriety.
- The concern is raised through appropriate channels as set out in this policy.

Individuals making disclosures in line with this policy will not face disciplinary action, dismissal, or any detriment as a result of raising a concern in good faith. However, deliberate false or malicious allegations may lead to disciplinary action and may result in legal consequences.

Confidentiality

3.2 Disclosures will be treated in a sensitive and confidential manner wherever possible. While anonymity cannot be guaranteed during investigations, the identity of the whistleblower will be protected as far as practicable and will not be disclosed without their consent unless required by law or for a fair investigation.

Anonymous Allegations

3.3 This policy encourages individuals to put their name to any disclosures they make. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less credible, but they may be considered at the discretion of the Company. The factors to be taken into account will include:

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

Untrue Allegations

- 3.4 If an individual makes an allegation in good faith, which is not confirmed by subsequent investigation, no action will be taken against that individual. In making a disclosure the individual should exercise due care to ensure the accuracy of the information. If, however, an individual makes malicious or vexatious allegations, and particularly if he or she persists with making them, disciplinary action may be taken against that individual.

4. Procedures for Making a Disclosure

- 4.1 On receipt of a complaint of malpractice, the member of staff who receives and takes note of the complaint, must pass this information as soon as is reasonably possible, to the appropriate designated investigating officer as follows:
- Complaints of malpractice will be investigated by the appropriate Head or Director unless the complaint is against the Head or Director or is in any way related to the actions of the Head or Director. In such cases, the complaint should be passed to the relevant Awarding Body or Department for Education. The decision to escalate the matter to an external body such as the relevant Awarding Body or the Department for Education will be made by a panel consisting of a senior leader (not involved in the complaint), a representative from Human Resources, and the institution's designated safeguarding or compliance officer.
 - In the case of a complaint, which is in any way connected with, but not against the Director, an external party is to act as the alternative investigating officer.
- 4.2 If there is evidence of criminal activity, then the investigating officer after consulting with HR should inform the police. The Company will ensure that any internal investigation does not hinder a formal police investigation.
- 4.3 In all cases, HR must be informed of the complaint promptly to ensure appropriate oversight and to provide support throughout the investigation process. HR will maintain a record of all reported malpractice cases and may advise on any necessary actions to protect staff and the organisation.

5. Timescales

- 5.1 While the complexity of individual cases means timescales may vary, UK Graduate College aims to:
- Acknowledge receipt of a concern within 5 working days
 - Provide an update to the whistleblower within 20 working days, or sooner where possible

- 5.2 The investigating officer will ensure a written acknowledgement of the concern to the complainant and thereafter report back to them in writing the outcome of the investigation and on the action that is proposed.
- 5.3 All responses to the complainant should be in writing and sent to their home address marked "confidential".

6. Investigating Procedure

6.1 The investigating officer should follow these steps:

- i. Full details and clarifications of the complaint should be obtained in writing.
- ii. The investigating officer should inform the member of staff against whom the complaint is made as soon as is practically possible. The member of staff will be informed of their right to be accompanied by a trade union or work colleague at any future interview or hearing held under the provision of these procedures. At the discretion of the investigating officer, and dependant on the circumstances of the complaint, an alternative representative may be allowed e.g., the individual's legal representative.
- iii. Considering whether external parties (auditors, police, Awarding Body) should be involved.
- iv. The allegations should be fully investigated by the investigating officer with the assistance where appropriate, of other individuals / bodies.
- v. A judgement concerning the complaint and validity of the complaint will be made by the investigating officer. This judgement will be detailed in a written report containing the findings of the investigations and reasons for the judgement. The report will be passed to the Director, or Business Owner as appropriate.
- vi. The Director / Business Owner will decide what action to take. If the complaint is shown to be justified, then they will invoke the disciplinary or other appropriate Company procedures.
- vii. The complainant should be kept informed of the progress of the investigations and, if appropriate, of the final outcome.
- viii. If appropriate, a copy of the outcomes will be used to enable a review of Company procedures.

6.2 If the complainant is not satisfied that their concern is being properly dealt with by the investigating officer, they have the right to raise it in confidence with the Director / Business Owner.

6.3 If the investigation finds the allegations unsubstantiated and all internal procedures have been exhausted, but the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, UK Graduate recognises the lawful rights of employees and ex-employees to make disclosures to prescribed persons or body.

7. Policy Review

This Whistleblowing Policy will be reviewed biennially by the Senior Leadership Team in consultation with Human Resources and the Governance Lead, or sooner if required by changes in legislation, regulatory requirements, or following a significant incident or investigation.

Any updates or amendments to the policy will be formally approved by the Board (or equivalent governing body) and communicated promptly to all staff. Staff will be given access to the revised version and informed of any significant changes.

The review will consider:

- The effectiveness of the policy in practice
- Any trends or recurring issues arising from whistleblowing cases
- Feedback from staff or external regulators
- Compliance with relevant legislation, including the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and education-specific guidance (e.g., Ofsted, ESFA, or Awarding Bodies)