



## **PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE POLICY PROCEDURE**

This policy is available on-line at: [www.tynecoast.ac.uk](http://www.tynecoast.ac.uk)

- We will consider any request for this policy to be made available in an alternative format or language. Please note that the College may charge for this. Please contact: Director of Governance
- We review our policies regularly to update them and to ensure that they are accessible and fair to all. We welcome suggestions for improving the accessibility or fairness of this policy.
- All our policies are subject to equality impact assessments\*. We are always keen to hear from anyone who wishes to contribute to these impact assessments. Please contact: Director of Governance

\*Equality Impact Assessments are carried out to see whether the policy has, or is likely to have, a negative impact on grounds of: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

| <b>Approved by:</b>    | <b>Version:</b> | <b>Issue Date:</b> | <b>Review Date:</b> | <b>Contact Person:</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Audit Committee</b> | <b>v.6</b>      | <b>April 2018</b>  | <b>April 2021</b>   | Director of Governance |

**Equal Opportunities:      Impact Assessed**

**Review:      3 years**

**POLICY NUMBER 47**

# Public Interest Disclosure Policy and Procedure

## 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 and workers (referred to as 'workers' in this policy) with a means for raising genuine concerns of suspected bribery, breaches of the law and other serious wrongdoings.
- 1.2 The College encourages workers 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 workers to raise genuine concerns through internal College procedures without fear of adverse repercussions being taken against them. The law allows workers to raise such concerns externally and this policy informs workers 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 workers 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 the Assistant Principal (TyneMet College). This policy and procedure is designed for the use of workers of the College.

## 2. Applicability of this policy and procedure

- 2.1 This policy applies to all employees of the College, including apprentices; and
- 2.2 Workers which includes any casual workers; home-based casual workers; employees of subcontractors; and
- 2.3 Agency workers engaged by the College.
- 2.4 Workers 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 worker in this situation is encouraged to approach the Executive Director of Human Resources in confidence for advice.

### **3. Protected disclosures**

- 3.1 The law protects workers who, out of a sense of public duty, want to reveal suspected wrongdoing or malpractice.
- 3.2 The law allows workers 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 worker making it, also be made in the public interest. A protected disclosure must consist of information and not merely be allegations of suspected malpractice.

### **4. Specific Subject Matter**

If, in the course of employment, a worker 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.

### **5. Procedure for making a disclosure**

- 5.1 Information, which a worker reasonably believes tends to show one or more of the situations given in Section 4 should promptly be disclosed to the worker's immediate line manager so that any appropriate action can be taken.
- 5.2 If it is inappropriate to make such a disclosure to their line manager, a worker can raise the issue with Director of Governance.
- 5.3 If the disclosure relates to the Chief Executive, a worker can raise the issue with the Director of Governance. In the event that the disclosure relates to the Director of Governance, a worker can raise the issue with the Chair of the Audit Committee.
- 5.4 Workers 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.

5.5 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 Governance.

## **6. Procedure for investigation of a disclosure**

6.1 When a worker makes a disclosure, the College will acknowledge its receipt, in writing, within a reasonable time.

6.2 The College will then determine whether or not it believes that the disclosure is wholly without substance or merit. If the College considers that the disclosure does not have sufficient merit to warrant further action, the worker will be notified in writing of the reasons for the College's decision and advised that no further action will be taken by the College under this policy and procedure. Considerations to be taken into account when making this determination may include the following:

- If the College is satisfied that a worker does not have a reasonable belief that suspected malpractice is occurring; or
- If the matter is already the subject of legal proceedings or appropriate action by an external body; or
- If the matter is already subject to another, appropriate College procedure.

6.3 When a worker makes a disclosure, which has sufficient substance or merit warranting further action, the College will take action it deems appropriate (including action under any other applicable College policy or procedure). Possible actions could include internal investigation; referral to the College's auditors; or referral to relevant external bodies such as the police, OfSTED, Health and Safety Executive or the Information Commissioner's Office.

6.4 If appropriate, any internal investigation would be conducted by the Director of Governance or by an external investigator appointed by the College as appropriate.

- 6.5 Any recommendations for further action made by the College will be addressed to the Chief Executive or Chair of the College's Audit Committee, as appropriate in the circumstances. The recipient will take all steps within their power to ensure the recommendations are implemented unless there are good reasons for not doing so.
- 6.6 The worker making the disclosure will be notified of the outcome of any action taken by the College under this policy and procedure within a reasonable period of time. If the worker is not satisfied that their concern has been appropriately addressed, they can appeal against the outcome by raising the issue with the Chair of the Board within 10 working days on receipt of the notification letter. The Chair of the Board will make a final decision on action to be taken and notify the worker making the disclosure.
- 6.7 All communications with the worker will be made in writing and sent to the employee's home address, rather than through the internal mail.

*Note*

*If investigations into the concern are prolonged, the College will keep the worker concerned updated as to the progress of the investigation and provide an estimated timeframe for its conclusion.*

## **7. Safeguards for workers making a disclosure**

- 7.1 A worker 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 worker 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 a worker on the grounds of making a disclosure made under this policy or procedure. This does not prevent the College from bringing disciplinary action against a worker 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 A worker 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 a worker 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 workers to raise disclosures internally within the College. A worker 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.
- 8.2 Workers 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 Workers can also make disclosures on a confidential basis to a practising solicitor or barrister.
- 8.4 If a worker 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. Whistleblowing and Safeguarding**

- 9.1 The College has a Safeguarding Policy and designated staff in place to deal with safeguarding issues.
- 9.2 If you have concerns about safeguarding practices within the College, you should feel able to raise concerns about poor or unsafe practice and potential failures in the College's safeguarding regime and know that such concerns will be taken seriously by the Senior Leadership Team. The Public Interest Disclosure Policy and Procedure is in place for such concerns to be raised with the College's Senior Leadership Team.
- 9.3 If you feel unable to raise an issue with your employer or feel that your genuine concerns are not being addressed, other channels may be open to you. General guidance can be found at- <https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing>
- 9.4 The NSPCC whistleblowing helpline is available for staff who do not feel able to raise concerns regarding child protection failures internally. Staff can call 0800 028 0285 – line is available from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, Monday to Friday and email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

## **10. Accountability**

- 10.1 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 College's Audit Committee on an annual basis as appropriate.

## 11. Further assistance for workers

- 11.1 The College will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of workers who make disclosures. If, at any stage of this procedure a worker 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 Director of Governance.
- 11.2 A worker making a disclosure may want to request counselling or other support from the College's occupational health service confidentially. Any such request for counselling or support services should be addressed to Executive Director of Human Resources. Such a request would be made in confidence.
- 11.3 Workers can also contact the charity Public Concern at Work for confidential advice on whistleblowing issues. Contact details are as follows:

3rd Floor, Bank Chambers  
6 - 10 Borough High Street  
London SE1 9QQ

Whistleblowing Advice Line: 020 7404 6609  
<http://www.pcaw.org.uk>

### College Contact Details:

#### Director of Governance

Tyne Coast College  
St. George's Avenue  
South Shields  
Tyne and Wear  
NE34 6ET  
Tel: 01914273903

Email: [neil.longstaff@stc.ac.uk](mailto:neil.longstaff@stc.ac.uk)

**(If in writing marked: 'Confidential: Only to be opened by the Director of Governance')**

#### Chair of the Board or Audit Committee

Tyne Coast College  
St. George's Avenue  
South Shields  
Tyne and Wear  
NE34 6ET

**(In writing marked: 'Confidential: Only to be opened by the Chair of the Board or Audit Committee')**