



Confidentiality & Whistle Blowing

September 2024



Introduction

World Alternative Education is committed to conducting its business with honesty and integrity, and expects all staff to maintain high standards in accordance with their contractual obligations and the company's policies and procedures.

However, in all organisations there is the possibility of unprofessional, unethical or illegal conduct. A culture of openness, accountability and vigilance is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring or to address them when they do occur.

Staff should always use the normal line management processes for raising concerns. This policy is only for the purpose of raising concerns about wrongdoing and it is not an alternative for existing policies such as the grievance, disciplinary or complaints policies. The policy is therefore not a route through which employees can raise concerns about perceived mismanagement.

Aims of policy

- To encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected;
- To provide staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns;
- To reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns in good faith without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

This policy takes account of the Whistleblowing Arrangements Code of Practice issued by the British Standards Institute (PAS 1998:2008) and Public Concern at Work (Independent whistle blowing charity)

This policy does not form part of an employee's contract of employment. It is provided as guidance to all members of staff which reserves the right to amend content at any time.

Applicability

This policy reflects the company's current practices and applies to all individuals working at all levels of the organisation.

What is Whistleblowing?

Whistle blowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work.

This may include:

- Criminal activity
- Child protection and/or safeguarding concerns
- Miscarriages of justice
- Danger to health and safety

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- Damage to the environment
- Failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements
- Financial fraud or mismanagement
- Negligence
- Breach of the company's internal policies and procedures including its code of conduct
- Conduct likely to damage the company's reputation
- Unauthorised disclosure of confidential information
- The deliberate concealment of any of the above matters

A 'whistleblower' is a person who raises a genuine concern in good faith relating to any of the above. If staff are uncertain whether something is within the scope of this policy they should seek advice from the Director and if the matter is in relation to an alleged wrongdoing by the Director, then staff should seek the advice of the Public Concern at Work, the independent whistleblowing charity, who offer a confidential helpline.

Their contact details are:

Public Concern at Work Helpline: 020 7404 6609020

Email: whistle@pcaw.co.uk

Website: www.pcaw.co.uk

Raising a Whistleblowing concern

Any member of the company with a significant concern should address this in writing to the Director who will arrange a face to face meeting as soon as practicable to discuss their concern. They will record sufficient details to enable the matter to be thoroughly investigated.

The Director will take notes and produce a written summary of the concern raised and provide the 'whistleblower' with a copy within 5 working days. This will include an indication of how the company proposes to deal with the matter. Staff may bring a colleague or trade union representative to any meeting under this policy. Any third party involved must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation.

Confidentiality

World Alternative Education hopes that staff will feel able to report whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. The company does not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously as it may make proper investigations more difficult. However, whistleblowers who are concerned about possible reprisals if their identity is revealed should still come forward explaining their fears so appropriate measures can then be taken to preserve confidentiality as necessary. If it is possible to complete necessary investigations without disclosing the identity of the 'whistleblower' then the employee will have the choice of either withdrawing or agreeing to his/her identity becoming known to enable the concern to be effectively dealt with.

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Any third party involved in the investigation e.g. trade union representatives, must respect the confidentiality of the disclosure and any subsequent investigation. If an individual misuses the policy and procedure e.g. by making malicious or repeated unsubstantiated complaints against colleagues this could give rise to action under the company's disciplinary procedure.



External Disclosures

The aim of this policy is to provide an internal mechanism for reporting, investigating and remedying any wrongdoing in the workplace. In the most cases staff should not find it necessary to alert anyone externally.

The law recognises that in some circumstances it may be appropriate for staff to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It is never appropriate to alert the media. We strongly encourage you to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. The independent whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, operates a confidential helpline (see contact details above in Confidentiality). They also have a list of prescribed regulators for reporting certain types of concern.

If the matter of whistleblowing is against the 'regime' in school and therefore cannot be managed by the Director then 'whistleblowers' are advised to contact their local authority designated officer in the first instance.

Email: whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk

Once a member of staff has raised a concern, the Director will carry out the initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation and inform the 'whistleblower' of the outcome. The member of staff raising the concern may be required to attend additional meeting to provide further information. The company may appoint an investigator or specialist knowledge of the subject matter. The investigator(s) may make recommendations for change to enable the company to minimise the risk of future wrongdoing.

Any member of staff raising a concern under the procedure will be kept informed of progress by the Director, including, where appropriate, the final outcome. However, in certain circumstances, e.g. where disciplinary action under the company's disciplinary procedure has resulted from the concern, it may not be appropriate to provide specific details due to the confidentiality and sensitivity of such matters.

The company will deal with the concern fairly and in an appropriate way. There are no rights of appeal against any decisions taken under this policy. If the investigation concludes that a 'whistleblower' has made false allegations maliciously, in bad faith or with a view to personal gain, the 'whistleblower' will be subject to disciplinary action under the company's disciplinary policy and procedure.

Protection and Support for 'Whistleblowers'

It is understandable that 'whistleblowers' are sometime worried about possible repercussions. The company aims to encourage openness and will support staff who raise genuine concerns in good faith under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

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Staff must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern in good faith. If a member of staff believes that he or she has suffered any such treatment, he or she should inform the Director immediately. If the matter is not remedied the member of staff should raise it formally using the company's grievance policy and procedure.

Staff must not threaten or retaliate against 'whistleblowers' in any way. Anyone involved in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

All staff are responsible for the success of this policy and should ensure that it is used to disclose any suspected danger or wrongdoing.



Safeguarding

If a member of staff suspects that there are any safeguarding issues which are not being taken seriously or they believe there is a serious safeguarding issue involving the Director, they should in the first instance contact the designated safeguarding lead.

This policy should be read in line with the local authority's practice on whistleblowing.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually or in light of any changes in legislation and/or guidance.

This policy document will be reviewed in September 2025.

Signed by:

Martin Coy (General Manager)

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