Truro and Penwith
Academy Trust

Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure
(Making a Disclosure in the Public Interest)

1 Introduction

1.1 The Trust is committed to operating in an ethical and principled way. The aim of this policy and procedure is to provide staff and other members of the Company (referred to as 'workers' throughout this document) with a means for raising genuine concerns of suspected bribery, breaches of the law and other serious malpractice or wrongdoing within the organisation.

1.2 The Trust 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 without fear of reprisal.

1.3 The Public Interest Disclosure Act came into effect in 1999 and gives legal protection to employees against being dismissed or penalised by their employers as a result of publicly disclosing certain serious concerns. The law allows workers to raise such concerns externally and this policy informs staff 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, probity and accountability which underpin legislation protecting whistleblowers are reflected in this policy and procedure. The Trust is also committed to ensuring compliance with the Bribery Act 2010.

1.6 Students and pupils at the academies are also encouraged to raise genuine concerns about suspected wrongdoing by making a complaint to a teacher or other member of staff within their academy. This policy and procedure is designed for the use of staff of the Trust.

2 Applicability of this policy and procedure

2.1 This policy applies to all employees of the Trust, including apprentices; and

2.2 Workers which includes any casual workers; home-based casual workers; and employees of subcontractors; and

2.3 Agency workers engaged by the Trust.

2.4 Workers might be unsure whether it is appropriate to raise their concern under this policy and procedure. Any worker in this situation is encouraged to approach the Trust Company Secretary

3 Protected disclosures

3.1 The law protects workers who, out of a sense of public duty and in good faith, want to reveal suspected wrongdoing or malpractice.

3.2 The law allows staff 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, improper conduct or unethical behaviour 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 their 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 the Trust's Chief Executive.

5.3 If the disclosure relates to the Chief Executive, a worker can raise the issue with the Chair of the Finance, Employment and Audit Committee by contacting the Trust Company Secretary.

5.4 Workers are encouraged to identify themselves when making a disclosure. If an anonymous disclosure is made, the Trust will not be in a position to notify the individual making the disclosure of the outcome of action taken by the Trust.

Anonymity also means that the Trust will have difficulty in investigating such a concern. The Trust 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 Trust Company Secretary

6. Procedure for investigation of a disclosure

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

6.2 The Trust will then determine whether or not it believes that the disclosure is wholly without substance or merit. If the Trust 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 Trust's decision and advised that no further action will be taken by the Trust under this policy and procedure. Considerations to be taken into account when making this determination may include the following:

- if the Trust 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 Trust procedure.

6.3 When a worker makes a disclosure which has sufficient substance or merit warranting further action, the Trust will take action it deems appropriate (including action under any other applicable Trust policy or procedure). Possible actions could include internal investigation; referral to the Trust'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 a manager of the Trust without any direct association with the individual to whom the disclosure relates, or by an external investigator appointed by the Trust as appropriate.

6.5 Any recommendations for further action made by the Trust will be addressed to the Trust's Chief Executive or Chair of the Board of Directors 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 Trust 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 of Directors within 10 working days by contacting the Company Secretary. The Chair of the Board of Directors will make a final decision on action to be taken and notify the worker making the disclosure.

7 Safeguards for workers making a disclosure

7.1 A worker making a disclosure under this procedure can expect the matter to be treated confidentially by the Trust and, where applicable, their name will not be disclosed to anyone implicated in the suspected wrongdoing, without their prior approval. For confidentiality purposes, if the worker requests to raise their concern verbally, it would be appropriate for the Trust to allow the worker to do so.

7.2 The Trust will take all reasonable steps to ensure that any report of recommendations, or other relevant documentation, produced by the Trust does not identify the worker making the disclosure without their written consent, or unless the Trust 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 a disclosure made under this policy or procedure. This does not prevent the Trust from bringing disciplinary action against a worker where the Trust has grounds to believe that a disclosure was made maliciously or vexatiously, or where a disclosure is made outside the Trust 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 Trust 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 Trust against the colleague in question.

8. Disclosure to external bodies

8.1 If a worker seeks advice outside of the Trust, they must be careful not to breach any confidentiality obligations or damage the Trust's reputation in so doing, within the context of the clauses below.

8.2 This policy and procedure has been implemented to allow workers to raise disclosures internally within the Trust. A worker has the right to make a disclosure outside of the Trust where there are reasonable grounds to do so and in accordance with the law.

8.3 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.

8.4 Workers can also make disclosures on a confidential basis to a practising solicitor or barrister.

9. Accountability

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

10. Further assistance for workers

10.1 The Trust 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 Trust's Chief Executive.

10.2 A worker making a disclosure may want to confidentially request counselling or other support from the occupational health service. Any such request for counselling or support services should be addressed to the Chief Executive. Such a request would be made in confidence.

10.3 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

This policy was approved by the Board of Directors on 23 February 2016.